HALF A MILLION TRAMPS

HALF A MILLION TRAMPS

BY

W. A. GAPE

LONDON
GEORGE ROUTLEDGE & SONS LTD.
BROADWAY HOUSE: 68-74 CARTER LANE, E.C.4
1936

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY HEADLEY BROTHERS
109 KINGSWAY, LONDON, W.C.2 ; AND ASHFORD, KENT

HALF A MILLION TRAMPS

CHAPTER ONE

IN the fateful days of 1914—a year which marked a turning-point in my life as it did in so many others, I was a schoolboy of fourteen, living in the town of Wembley, Middlesex. I was working for the " John Lyons " Scholarship, which carried with it the privilege of attending the Harrow County School. I sincerely wanted to win this scholarship, and studied hard for it. I managed to reach second place in the local examination, and so qualified for the final. But then I had one of the greatest disappointments of my life. Although I had worked so hard, my parents refused to allow me to enter the final examination. I did not feel the injury so much until the results were made known. Three lads who were in the same class as myself and, incidentally, were placed below me in the local examination, passed with flying colours. I was then, and still am, sure that I also would have passed the final and thus have obtained education which would have fitted me to fight my way in the world.

This event came as the climax to a very unhappy home life. I had three sisters and a brother all older than myself, and two younger brothers. For some reason I have never understood my elders regarded me as the " mug ". While my sisters

went on holidays or out to parties I was kept at home to do work about the house. When we had visitors I was banished to the kitchen, while my brothers and sisters put on their " best clothes " and were " shown off ".

My father was regarded as a religious man, but the only evidence I had in support of this belief was the fact that he was active in church work. I shall always remember him as a brute and a hypocrite. His bigoted patriotism and pig-headed theology dominated what passed for our home life.

I could not reconcile my parents' actions with their " Christian teaching ", and certainly could not swallow the " Catholic " teaching of eternal punishment. I was foolish enough to tell my teacher so, and was promptly told that I would die on the scaffold, or some equally pleasant place. When my father heard of this, it annoyed him so much that he got out the strap and did his best to save me from the scaffold by almost flogging me to death.

It was after many hours of deep thought, night after night, week after week, that I decided to prepare for the day when I should break away from home and fight my own battle with life.

I well remember calculating what I considered would be sufficient to meet my expenses while searching for a job. I finally decided that I would be able to make a success of my adventure if I had ten shillings. My next problem was to raise such an enormous sum. I made attempts to find a job locally, but was prevented by my parents. Eventually I thought of going to a golf course in Wembley, and collecting as many golf balls as I

could to sell to boys for sums varying from one penny to threepence each.

As I look back on those days I have a feeling that my enthusiasm to get a large supply of golf balls urged me to find them before they had been lost. I well remember hiding behind a bank and waiting for some players to drive a ball into the rough or slice it over into the field in which I was. If I could get the ball without being seen I would pocket it at once and keep out of sight. But if I was noticed I would energetically help the golfers to search for the ball, work towards it, and press it into the ground with my heel, recovering it at my leisure. In those days there was a great demand for golf balls among schoolboys, who used the rubber for making model aeroplanes. A framework of thin wood strips covered with paper or parchment, a small propeller, and a quantity of elastic was practically all that was necessary for a plane. In order to get the elastic, many boys would split open a golf ball, unroll the strip of rubber forming the core, and fold it into strands to fit their model plane. And as the craze was at its height, I was able to sell two or three balls every day.

My next difficulty was to find a safe hiding-place for my savings. Finally I chose a very dark corner of the coal cellar at home. I found that a toffee-tin half filled with sawdust served as an excellent " bank " so long as I was the only one who knew of its existence. My secret fund grew and grew until I had over eight shillings saved up, and my disturbed nights of worry were replaced by hours of delightful anticipation. I began to count the days to the time

when I would be able to pass through the garden gate never to return.

My happiness was short-lived. Arriving home one day with my pocket full of golf balls, I felt sure that all was not well with my " bank ", for the children playing in the garden were so well stocked with sweets that they were giving them away to all and sundry. I was overcome with fear. I dared not ask where they had got the money, so I crept into the cellar to see how the " bank " stood. When I got there I found the tin overturned and the sawdust lying in a heap beside it. I stifled a cry of despair and plunged my hands in the sawdust. The comforting feel of coins relieved my anxiety for a while. I dared not attract attention by striking a match, so I had to feel in the darkness to recover what I could of my wealth. Those minutes of agony appeared to be hours. My first impulse was to rush into the garden, demand to know who the robber was, and murder him on the spot ; but the thought of the thrashing I would get if my secret became known induced wiser thoughts. An ash stick or a stout leather strap across my back for the slightest cause had taught me the necessity of always acting with caution.

My hands worked through the coal-dust and sawdust in search of pennies and halfpennies. I was crying inwardly, but I was too scared to show any outward sign. All my hopes of escape seemed dashed to the ground as I picked up the tin and its contents, hid it under my jacket and stole away from the house. About half a mile away was an iron bridge crossing the main railway. The bridge was

very little used and so was ideal for my purpose, for I wanted a spot where I could sit down and sort my coppers from the coal dust and dirt of the cellar. No one passed me, and by the time I had sorted and cleaned my money I found that my fund had been reduced to four shillings and fivepence.

To this day I do not know why, but I had a strong feeling that it would be unwise to return home with the tin, so I hid it in the railway embankment, and made my way back to the house.

When I got back a great enquiry was being held to solve the problem of how the children came to be in possession of money and sweets in such quantities. Childlike, they had furnished the information that the supply of cash came from a tin in the coal cellar. Search had been made, and to my dismay traces of sawdust had been found. As I was dirty with coal-dust I could not deny all knowledge of the affair.

I could not account for my dirty condition without telling of my great secret, so I made up my mind to say nothing at all. I was accused of stealing the money, and, because I had no explanation to offer, was given a sound thrashing with the strap. To this day I can remember the agony of that strap biting into my flesh. I was flogged until I could hardly get my breath. As the blows fell I was forced to the ground. I called upon Christ to take me to His arms right away, for there was no one at home to whom I could appeal for help. And death seemed the only way out. I was picked up, set on my feet, and chased up to bed. I was left alone without supper, food or drink. As my pain eased and my thoughts cleared I remembered the

tin in the railway embankment. If I could only get that tin again I would be able to go to London and not come back. I listened to see if all was quiet, then I crept from the bed and peered over the banisters to see if the road was clear. I did not know the time, but I could hear my parents and brothers and sisters talking downstairs. I knew that if I could go quietly down the stairs I could creep out of the house by the back door, and be free to go where I liked.

I dressed quickly and made my way downstairs. My luck was in. The stairs, which would creak at any other time, made not a sound that night. Slowly I went down and along the passage to the back door. I heard voices; they were discussing how much I had stolen and whom I had robbed. I was not interested in their talk, so I did not stop to listen. With great care I lifted the latch of the back door. Beads of perspiration ran down from my forehead. I was all excited with the knowledge that if I could only open the door without being caught I could get away and not be missed for an hour or two.

The door-latch was rather stiff, and it made a noise which to me sounded like a bull charging at the door. Terror-stricken, I left the door open and crouched behind some coats that were hanging quite handy. For some moments I waited, sure that someone must have heard me lift the latch and would come out to investigate. No one came. The voices still went on. Now I could make my escape. With the door already open it was a simple matter for me to get out quietly. Keeping close to the wall of the

house, I made my way to the garden gate and passed through it into the street.

As I turned into the street my spirits rose, and, imagining myself a convict breaking from jail, I ran and ran towards the railway bridge.

Even during the day this "Iron Bridge" was a deserted and desolate spot, but that night the dark and stillness were almost terrifying. I had never before been near the bridge by myself at night. For one thing there was no real need to use the bridge at any time, but another important reason was that we children believed this bridge to be visited by "Jack the Ripper".

Fortunately the moon was up a little that night, so I quickly found my tin. Then I sat down and counted the money to make sure it was all there, but having a secret hope that someone, by some means, had changed the coppers into silver, or even gold. It was very chilly sitting down in this spot, but unless I went on to the bridge there was no protection from the wind. The bridge had steps leading to the top, which was shielded from the wind by solid sheet-iron walls. I did not fancy going on to the bridge, but I liked still less the idea of returning the way I had come. I realized that the best way would be to cross the bridge and so get to the Wembley Hill side of the town without being seen by anyone who knew me. But the possibility that "Jack the Ripper" might be on the bridge was almost too much for me. I could not bring myself to cross right over to the other side, but I felt there would be no harm in going up the steps and peeping to see if anyone was encamped at the top.

Slowly and noiselessly I crept up the steps. All was quiet. I was gathering courage to march boldly across, when a girl's voice whined " Oh, please don't, Jack ! " I stood rooted to the ground. I could not run down again, nor had I the courage to rush to the rescue of the girl who I was sure was about to be cut limb from limb by the notorious " Jack the Ripper ".

On the bridge I saw two forms swaying a little. One was locked in the arms of the other. No further sound came from either. I pressed close to the iron wall of the bridge and tried to think what was the best thing to do. Now the forms were standing still against the wall. It occurred to me that the villain had either seen or heard me, and was keeping close to the side of the bridge to avoid being seen. For a moment I thought I had him in my power, and that I would make him release the girl. Then I would order him never to return to the bridge again. On second thoughts I decided that after all perhaps it would be better for me to go down the steps again, and take the chance of being seen near my home. Carefully I started to make my way down. I did not fancy the idea of turning my back upon the villain, so I took hold of the side-rail and went down the steps backwards.

Nobody followed me, but to my horror I heard a faint noise at the bottom of the steps. The noise grew louder and louder, until I could distinctly hear footsteps coming towards me. Two people, a man and a woman, came right to the foot of the steps. Then the woman hesitated, but the man encouraged her, and they both came up towards me. I could not decide what to do. I thought I ought to warn

them of what to expect at the top ; then I quickly changed my mind in favour of letting them go up. If there was a struggle I might run past unnoticed, and so get out of my terrible difficulty. So I stood still and waited. As they passed me I heard the girl say, " Playing gooseberry, I expect." Neither gave any other sign that they had seen me. Breathlessly I watched them reach the top. To my surprise no sound came from them, and they passed out of sight. I quickly followed, and found they were slowly crossing the bridge, apparently taking no notice of anyone. I crept up close beside them, hoping that when the fight started I would be able to rush past, and so escape.

I tip-toed close behind the couple and kept in their shadow. To my amazement we passed the " Ripper " in absolute calm and quiet. When I thought I was a safe distance away curiosity made me peep back, and I saw him gently holding his victim in his arm and actually stroking her hair. Even then I did not realize that I was mistaken in thinking a vile murder was being committed that night. When I looked ahead again the couple I had been following were standing close to the side of the bridge. So I plucked up courage and stepped out firmly as if I was not aware of the presence of anyone, and would not even be frightened if I were.

I got safely across, and followed a footpath which brought me out on to the main road at the bottom of Wembley Hill. I had no idea where to sleep for the night, but my one desire was to get as far away from Wembley as possible. So I boarded a tram and paid my fare to Edgware Road.

It is a long tram journey from Wembley to Edgware Road, and as I stepped off at the terminus a clock said half-past ten. I was very hungry, so I looked around for somewhere to eat. Close to the Metropolitan Music Hall I found a shop which sold hot pies, gravy and potatoes. Without caring much about the price I went in and ordered two pies and potatoes on a plate, with tea and bread and butter. The size of the order caused a little amusement to the girl who took it and the man to whom it was passed on. When she brought my meal she said, with a smile : " Get that lot down you and you'll not come to any harm, son."

I asked how much I was to pay, and she said one shilling. I took out a handful of coppers and counted a shillingsworth on to the table. She looked inquisitively at my money and asked, " Have you been gambling, or is it a gas meter you've broken ? "

I blushed deeply. I had not bargained for questions from this quarter. I had no answer ready. She went away to serve other customers, and I got down to my supper. As I had had nothing to eat since noon that day I was ready to do justice to any sort of meal. The shop was warm, and the feed made me feel more comfortable. My thoughts turned to the problem of getting lodgings for the night. It was very late, and I had no idea where to go or what to do.

I realized that I could not sit in the shop all night, so I decided to go out and see what I could find. The wind was blowing hard, and the cold penetrated through my clothes. I walked and walked down this street and up that, until I grew so tired that I

felt I must rest somewhere. As I was not sure what I was really looking for it was not surprising that an hour or more had passed without my finding anything.

Ahead of me I saw a coffee stall. I did not feel like eating just yet, but I thought that if I bought a cup of coffee I could drink it slowly and rest awhile. As the stall stood the wind was at its back. It had two side sheets which hung down to the ground, so that by standing close to the counter I could be protected from the cold. I asked for my coffee. As the man was pouring it out he looked at me curiously.

" Out late for a youngster, ain't yer ? " he said.

" Yes," I replied. " It is very late."

He accepted my answer as an indication that I had no desire to discuss the matter, so he turned to the task that had been occupying him before I arrived. He seemed to be preparing to close his stall for the night, for he was counting cakes and pies, etc., and there were little stacks of money on a shelf. The coffee was good and I enjoyed it. Again I realized that I had no clear idea how I was to spend the night. While I was turning things over in my mind I became aware of the presence of another lad about my own age. He was very thin and his clothes were ragged, his long hair hung below his cap, and in places stuck through it. He was shivering with cold, and was rubbing his hands to keep them warm. He looked up to the coffee stall keeper and called out :

" Got any crusts, Jim ? "

Jim looked at him. " Where's your old man ? " he asked.

" Dunno," the boy replied. " I ain't seen him for days."

The stall keeper poured out some coffee, put several slices of bread and butter on a plate, and handed them to the boy, with :

" You're just in time. I should be away from here by now. Get that stowed away and be quick."

The boy ate his bread and butter and drank his coffee. With a cry of " Fanks Jim " he moved off into the darkness. I felt sure that he could tell me what I wanted to know, so I ran after him, caught him up, and asked him if he could tell me of a place where I could sleep for the night.

" Are yer out on the tiles, too ? " he asked, and looked me up and down. I felt it would be best to tell him the truth, so I told him I had run away from home only that night.

Although he was so young he showed great understanding.

" You can ' kip ' wiv me if yer like," he said. " It's only an old hut, but it'll fit two of us."

I accepted without demur and, promising to obey all his instructions, I let him lead me to a large yard. We carried on all conversation in whispers, and he told me to move quietly and not make a sound.

We climbed over a small wooden fence, and were soon creeping across the yard. Stealthily we moved towards a corner. Out of the darkness came a faint yelping and the rattle of a chain.

" Good old Jacko," whispered the boy. As he moved forward a dog jumped towards him. I could not see very well because of the darkness, but it was clear that the dog and the boy were friends.

" I let's him go every night and he's allus back early in the morning," the boy said to me in an undertone. " We take over his hut till daylight. Savvy ? "

The dog, which was a rough-haired brown terrier, was enjoying a roll in the dust. It showed no signs that it objected to being turned out of its house and home for the night. No doubt it was glad to be free for a while.

My friend was now on his knees, poking his head into the dog kennel. He struck a match, and after a few seconds turned to me.

" It's all right, 'nuff room for two, so I'll show you the way in."

He lay on his back, put his feet through the hole, and worked his way in so that his feet were at the back end of the kennel and his head was by the opening. When he was in, he turned on to his stomach and looked out at me.

" Can yer make it thet way ? " he asked.

I told him I could, and was soon on my back and working my way in. Under my feet I felt straw easily six inches deep. Slowly I made my way in, the only sound I made being a gentle rustling of straw as I moved. My feet touched the back of the kennel, but I still had my head outside, so I had to draw my knees up so as to get right in. We had raised rather a dust through disturbing the straw.

" In a bit I'll close up the hole, then we shall be warm. Yer all right ? " he asked.

I snuggled down into the straw and told him I would be comfortable enough. At the moment I was sure I would be, but I changed my opinion later on.

He drew some straw in front of the hole, leaving only a couple of inches air space at the top. For a while it was good enough. The novelty of the situation appealed to me. Before long, however, I became sleepy, and naturally wanted to stretch my legs as if I were in bed. But I could not, nor could I turn over without disturbing my friend, who by now was sleeping contentedly. I felt his legs shift across to the back corner at my side of the kennel, so I crossed mine in like manner. This gave me a few more inches of room, for which I was thankful. Now I could have slept but for the sharp ends of straw sticking into my ears and pricking my face. So by pulling my cap over one side of my face and drawing some straw together beneath it, I made a heap which formed quite a soft pillow.

I must have been asleep for some time when I was suddenly awakened. At first I thought someone was tapping the roof of the kennel, and heard a scurrying outside. Unexpectedly the straw which was stopping up the hole disappeared, the cool air rushed in, and to my amazement in came the dog. Rain was falling hard, and this had driven it home earlier than usual. The dog bounced in and landed on both of us. He licked my face and sniffed me, then turned to my friend. He was awake now, and as soon as he spoke the dog gave a yelp of joy and tried to snuggle down between the two of us. There was no room for it on the straw, but it was quite content to rest half on my friend and half on me.

" Blimey, it ain't half raining," said my friend, " and now Jacko's come back it'll be a little crowded like. How are yer getting on, mate ? Comfy ? "

I told him I was as comfortable as could be expected, which of course was perfectly true, though I was in no sense comfortable at all.

" 'Tain't daylight yet, so I'll 'ave anuver kip, then go for some breakfast."

He went to sleep again. The dog settled down, wriggled a little, and so stole a little more room. I heard it yawn and give a sigh of relief, and then, sticking its nose right under my arm, it went to sleep. With the three of us in the kennel it was too warm, almost stifling. My brain was hard at work. I began to wonder when I had been missed from home. There was no likelihood of being found while in this kennel, but where was I to go in the morning ?

The hours dragged on. My joints were stiff and my back ached. I tried to wriggle on to my back, but it was impossible. Sleep came in small doses. I would drop off, only to be awakened by a fresh downpour of rain, or by knocking my head against the wall of the kennel.

Light was gradually filtering in. The rain had stopped and all was quiet. The dog planted two paws on me and the other two on my friend and stretched itself. Then, to my great relief it crawled out of the kennel. The boy woke up and peered out of the hole.

" I fink I'll go an' get some breakfast," he said. " You stay here till I come back," and he crawled out of the kennel and went across the yard. I saw him climb the fence to drop down the other side out of sight. I put my head out of the kennel and stretched my legs. I felt the blood rushing through my body. I lay for a long time. My thoughts were

divided between my new friend and wondering what was happening at home. I must have fallen asleep again, for the next thing I knew the lad was standing before me with four pint cans of milk and two loaves of bread.

" Make room for us," he said, so I drew back into the kennel. I found that we could sit up more comfortably than we could lie down, so we sat up to eat our breakfast. It was a surprise to me that this boy, who had begged his supper the night before, could go out in the morning and get sixpennyworth of milk and fourpennyworth of bread. I remembered the money I had, so I offered to pay for my breakfast.

" Pay for it ! " he said. " Blimey, I don't buy milk or bread, it's on doorsteps waiting to be picked up for nuffin. I got to get more for to-night if I sleep 'ere. You keep yer money, and eat yer breakfast."

I was very thirsty, so I drank one can of milk and part of another. I ate a chunk of bread, but could not finish the loaf. I felt as if I would like something warm, so I asked him if he knew where we could get a nice hot cup of tea.

" Tea ! " he said excitedly. " Wouldn't I just like a big pint o' tea nar ! "

His face shone with expectation, and I decided to take him to a coffee shop right away. He knew of one which was at the corner of Edgware Road and Harrow Road, so off we went. Before we set out, however, the boy wrapped up the bread which was left over and put it under a board in the yard. The milk he poured into one can, throwing the empty

ones over the wall. He called the dog, put it on the chain again, and gave it a pat on the head. I felt I could not leave the animal without some sort of thanks, so I joined him in expressing our gratitude for a night's shelter.

We climbed the wall of the yard and made our way to the coffee shop. As we went my new pal began to take an active interest in my welfare, asking me what I intended to do in the future. He seemed quite concerned when I said I did not quite know what I should do, which surprised me, since he seemed to be in the same boat as myself.

We arrived at the coffee shop, and had a pint of tea and a rock cake each. My friend was all smiles when he felt the hot tea through a mug large enough for him to put his two hands round. He lifted the mug with both hands and drank deep.

" Fanks, mate. Dis is good," he said, picking up his cake and cramming his mouth full with half of it. I, too, was thankful for something hot.

As we sat we talked of the things youngsters like ourselves could do to earn a living. I learned that I was still a long way from the City, but once I got there I might be lucky and find a job. He told me he would not be going my way, but he wished me luck. He asked me not to say anything about the kennel, because if he was found out he would have nowhere to sleep when he was in that part of London.

I felt very sorry for him, and tried to express my gratitude to him by offering him a shilling. He would not take so much, but eventually I got him to accept sixpence. I left him at the junction of the

Harrow and Edgware Roads, and set off on my way to the City.

I counted my pennies. I had one and ninepence halfpenny to start me off in search of a job. At first I thought of a bus ride, but changed my mind in favour of walking past the shops in the hope that I would see the longed-for sign : " Boy Wanted."

I walked along the Edgware Road to the Marble Arch, and turned into Oxford Street. The road from the Marble Arch to the City is a long straight trail, and there is no need to stop to decide which turning to take. I walked and walked until at noonday I was at the Mansion House. All the way I had looked for a sign which might lead me to a job, but I had seen nothing.

When I reached the Mansion House I found I had the choice of six turnings. Since I had no idea where I wanted to go I had no reason to ask for directions. I was feeling hungry, so I decided to look for something to eat, and I could have a rest at the same time. At that moment I heard the beautiful chime of a clock coming from a little way back along Cheapside. It was the famous " Bow Bells ". I turned back, but almost immediately I had another surprise. Another famous clock started to strike twelve. It was the one above the shop of Bennett's, the clockmakers.

This clock was an elaborate affair, for it had moving figures which struck the bells, and retired out of sight again. I stayed to hear the last stroke of twelve before I went on. Several other people had also stopped, and in order to avoid the crowd I took a narrow turning to the left which I found to be

Bow Churchyard. This road was filled with vans being loaded with parcels from the warehouse of Copestake and Crampton. There seemed to be lots of boys working here. Some were polishing the brasswork upon the horses' harness, while others were either carrying light parcels or counting them as they were thrown into the vans. I decided to try my luck and ask for a job. I was shown to a very small office, and was interviewed by a very old gentleman. He said he was sorry he could not find me a job at once, but if I would leave my address he would send for me the very next time he wanted a boy. I well remember my dilemma ! I had no address to give him, and I told him so. He was a very kind old man, and he at once asked why I had no home and how I came to be on my own when I was so young. I had little to tell him, but I told him the truth. He had a practical way of dealing with the situation. He asked if I had had dinner, and when I said " No " he wrote a note and told me to take it upstairs to the kitchen, where I would be given a meal.

" Come to me when you've finished, and in the meantime I'll see what can be done," he added.

While he was writing the note several men left the warehouse. I stopped one of them and asked him the way to the kitchen. " You come with me and I'll show you," he replied. He led me into the Churchyard, through another door, up some steps, and into a large hall. Here I found many men and boys seated at long tables, eating dinner. By their dress they seemed to be drivers' vanboys and warehousemen. I gave my note to the man in charge.

He asked: "Can you eat a big dinner?" I said I was hungry, and left it to him to decide whether the dinner should be large or small. He returned with a plate of beefsteak pudding, and set it before me.

"Take no notice of the other boys," he said. "Get that lot down you, and if you want some more ask me for it."

I thanked him very much, and set to work to polish it off. There was meat, pudding, peas and potatoes, and by the time I had finished half of it I was beginning to think I should have to leave some. But if I did leave any the man might think I did not like the food, so I made a heroic effort and finished the lot. But I felt that I could not eat another mouthful, nor did I dare to move for a while. The man in charge came over to me with the intention of filling my plate again.

"Can you manage any more?" he asked, with one of the most friendly smiles I have ever seen. I thanked him and told him I had had enough.

"All right, mate," he said. "But don't leave here hungry. Do you know whether the 'old man' wanted to see you again?"

I told him I was to see him before I left, and so would go down to him at once. "You'll find him now if you're quick, but if he's gone you won't see him till after dinner," he said.

I went back to the office, and found the old man still there as if waiting for me.

"Come in here, sonny," he said. "I think I've made things all right for you."

I went in and stood beside him.

"I've been on the 'phone to a place where I think you can stay until I'm ready for you. You'll have nothing to pay as we subscribe to their funds. Take this note, and I am sure you'll be fixed up for a day or two." He handed me the note, gave me sixpence, and told me to come as soon as I had a letter from him.

The note was addressed to the "Officer in Charge", the Salvation Army, 22 Whitechapel Road, E. I made my way along Cheapside and Fenchurch Street to Aldgate. Here I asked a policeman to show me the way. My destination was only five minutes' walk, and soon I was standing outside a gloomy looking place. By the windows was a group of men who were so dirty that they were revolting to look at. There were two doors to the building, but both were locked. I knocked at one, but received no answer.

"Yer can't get in till four," said one of the men. I took no notice of him, but went to the other door and knocked. In response to my knocking a man came to the door. He was dressed in a pair of overalls and a white jacket.

"What do you want?" he demanded.

I told him I had a note for the Officer in Charge.

"Wait there and I'll go and see," he said, retiring into the building. After a few minutes another man, dressed in Salvation Army uniform, came and asked me in. He took the note and read it.

"No home, eh?" he said, looking me over. "Well, come in here and we'll have a talk." He led me into an office. As there was only one chair he sat down and I stood by him.

" How long have you been without a home ? " he asked.

" Only one night."

" Only one night ! " he exclaimed. " Have you run away, or have you been turned out ? "

" Run away," I said.

" Where do your parents live ? " he asked. I told him Wembley. To my surprise he got up and said :

" Get back to Wembley ; I can't do anything for you."

When I recovered from the shock I asked what was to happen to my job. But instead of answering he called the other man to show me out of the building. I was mad at his treatment of me, and I felt like smashing a few windows.

To my surprise the men outside took my part and started back-chatting to the man at the door. Innocently I told the story of the note. " A bloody shame I call it," one said. " The kid's got a job to go to in a day or two, and he can't even get a night's kip."

I felt rather bucked by their sympathy, and sorry that I had thought so badly of them. One of them asked me if I had any idea where I could spend the night, and when I told him I had not, he said : " Go to the ship on the Embankment and they'll give you a kip for one night." I thanked him for the information, and as I moved off he called out : " Don't go before ten or else you will be too early."

Intending to go back to the old gentleman who gave me the note, I retraced my steps towards Aldgate High Street. Just by the meat market in the High Street I saw a coffee shop with large rock

cakes marked a penny each in the window. I thought a cup of tea and a rock cake would do me good, and since I wanted to think out my plans I went in.

The sight I saw in that shop will live with me to my grave. Just inside the door was a counter about six feet long. This was stacked with cakes, slices of bread and margarine, and bread and jam. Beyond the counter were high-backed seats at tables on each side of a narrow passage-way. Nearly all the seats were occupied. There were old men, young men, and boys like myself, old women and young girls and several babies. The first thing that struck me was that some of the women were smoking clay pipes. Above the seats hung a heavy cloud of smoke. Everybody seemed to be talking at once. The noise produced by the women's high-pitched voices and the men's loud profanities, plus the cries of the babies and the remonstrances of the girls in charge of them, made me wonder if it was a friendly gathering, or if they were about to break into a riot. I paid for my tea and cake, took them in my hand, and made my way towards a seat.

I had to go to the back of the shop to find a place. I put my tea on the table and sat down. There were five others already at this table. Two seats by the wall were occupied by old men. One was fast asleep with his arms spread across the table, and his head down so that his nose and forehead were touching it. All that I could see was a part of his back and the top of his head. His overcoat was a greenish blue. His hair hung around his ears and over his coat collar, his hands were filthy, and what I could see of

his face looked as if it had not been washed since the day the midwife left him.

The man opposite him was much cleaner, and had the kind of face one trusts at sight. His beard was not ragged, but was nicely trimmed. His face was clean and his eyes were always smiling. He was smoking a pipe, puffing out clouds of smoke sufficient to create a fog like a London " particular ".

Next to him was an old woman sitting with her elbows on the table and her face cupped in her hands. She was wrapped in several shawls and looked almost comically fat. The expression on her face indicated that she was fed up with life and little cared what happened next. Sitting beside her was a younger woman, and opposite her and next to me was another very old woman. She also was wrapped in shawls, but the younger woman was wearing a woollen tam-o'-shanter and a raincoat.

There was a nasty smell at the end of the shop ; it was so strong that I was put off my tea. At the table next to mine across the passage-way were some old women and girls all huddled together as if asleep. The scene frightened me, but I could not make up my mind whether to run out, or stay and keep myself to myself. I sipped at my tea and nibbled at the cake, taking half an hour to finish them off.

After a girl had collected the empty cups I sat there wondering what to do next. While I was thinking, the younger woman who was sitting opposite asked me : " Would you like another tea, sonny ? Go and get us both one and get yourself some bread and jam." She pushed a shilling across the table, and although I wanted to refuse I felt that

it would be better to do as she asked. So I went to the counter and ordered the teas. As I came back with them I overheard several remarks inquiring who I might be and what I did. I got back to my seat and put the change on the table near to her.

" Put it in your pocket, son," she said, " you'll need it if I've guessed right."

She took up her tea and sipped it. " Do you live round here ? " she asked.

" No," I told her. " I don't live anywhere at present ! "

This remark seemed to liven up all who were at my table. The man with the smiling eyes stared at me curiously, and the other old man looked up as if he had never heard of anyone being without a home. The old woman next to me became very sympathetic. She took hold of my arm and patted it.

" Pore little fellow," she said, " to be left alone at your age ! Where were you last night ? "

As I began to tell her the story of the dog kennel the younger woman said :

" Now, Maggie, I can look after this kid. You've got two lads already, so don't be greedy."

The two women stared at each other like tigers. " Perhaps he don't want you," said the older woman. " And anyway I could feed him and give him a bed." Turning to me, she said : " Would you like a nice home, sonny, where you could work and help yourself ? "

I was on the point of saying " yes " when the younger woman gave me a warning look. I thought I could save the situation by telling them I had a job to go to in a few days, but this only stimulated in

each of them the desire to gain my allegiance. They began a heated argument, and I thought they would come to blows. Quiet was restored when the man with the smiling eyes interrupted with :

" What do you want with another lad, Maggie ? Let Kate look after him. She can do with him."

His words had the effect of authority, for the old woman shook the other old man and said :

" Come on, lazybones. There's work to do."

With a contemptuous look at the younger woman she pushed herself away from the table. I stood up to let her pass, and at the same time Kate rose to allow the other old woman to get out. My side of the table was now empty, so I moved right up against the wall. Kate changed her seat by coming to sit next to me. The old man smiled at her and said : " Just the thing. Fix him up. I'll see you Saturday." Then with a smile he got up and left us.

" If you will help me," Kate said, quietly, " I can find you a good home. I had a boy like you, but I laid him in the graveyard two years ago. I have longed for another boy to love, but until I saw you I couldn't find one. Can you drink some more tea ?"

I had to refuse the tea, but I found myself liking Kate. She was a woman of about thirty-five years of age, some five feet tall. Her hair was dark and her face had a fresh complexion. She spoke softly, and there was a ring of sincerity in her voice. The queerest thing I noticed about her was that her eyes revealed a dual personality. One moment she would appear tender and gentle, the next hard and determined. She was of medium build, but there was a

suggestion of strength in her bearing. While we were talking three hefty-looking men came in. One of them stayed near the door, the others walked slowly towards us, scanning the face of everybody in the shop. Kate pressed my arm and whispered in my ear :

" Splits."

Before I could ask what she meant the two men were at our table. They took no notice of us, but turned their attention to the group of women who were asleep at the table opposite.

" Hey ! Wake up and let's have a look at you," said one of them, shaking the back of the seat. The sleepers came to life, sat up, and blinked sleepily at the two " splits ".

" Blimey, can't a respectable lady come in for a cup of ' char ' without being disturbed by the police ? " one of them asked.

" I've got no intention of disturbing respectable women, so don't get excited. Where were you last night, Hanna ? " the policeman said to the woman who had protested at being disturbed.

" In bed, where every honest woman was," she replied.

" Sure ! " said the policeman, " in which bed and who with ? " He glanced at the other women. " Have you got your bed ticket, Hanna ? " he asked.

" No," she replied. " I don't want everyone to know I live in a doss house."

" Well, you'll have a better bed to-night, unless you can prove it wasn't you who ' breeched ' that sailor and left him fast asleep in bed. Come on. We want you."

He took her by the arm and dragged her from her seat. She struggled with him, and several of her friends came to her assistance, shrieking and hitting out at him. A police-whistle blew. Two uniformed men rushed in at the door. The battle began to go against the " splits ". A woman lifted a mug and crashed it against the skull of one of them, and he fell to the ground. Some of them rushed to get out of the door. But the way was barred by uniformed men. I was frightened, but Kate told me not to do anything until she did.

The third " split " was now using all his strength to force the struggling women back against the wall. He signalled to the two at the door, and they stepped aside and let all those out who wished to go. It was a clever move on their part, as by doing so they isolated the women from any who might have been inclined to come to their rescue. Kate grabbed my arm and pulled me along to the door. Outside, police were keeping the pavement clear. Kate led me towards " Gardiners' Corner ", and did not speak to me until we were alone.

" That's made it hard for me," she said. " I didn't want to be mixed up with anything like that to-day. Anyway, we can't go back there. I wonder what time it is." She looked round and saw a clock above a building. It was nearly four o'clock. " I can't take you home to-night," she added. " Those splits will be hunting around for something somebody's lost. You don't want to be questioned by them, do you ? "

She looked at me with a smile. I did not want to have anything to do with the police, so I agreed with her.

" Where are you going to sleep to-night ? " she said.

I told her that at ten o'clock I could go to a ship on the Embankment and get a bed there.

" Have you been before ? " she asked. " Because if you haven't you're sure of a bed."

She felt in her pocket and pulled out some money. " If you go to the ship it won't cost you anything, so I've got enough for the pictures. Would you like to go ? " I said I would, and she led me down a side street. After a lot of twisting and turning we came to a picture house. Kate bought two tickets and we went in. A cowboy film was running as we entered, and it held my interest at once. The next picture was a sentimental love drama and must have suited Kate, for she put her arm round me and held me tight. Before the picture was half over she was telling me what she would like to do for me. If I did as she told me I would have plenty of food, a good bed, and money for sweets and pictures. This sounded good to me, and I arranged to meet her next day at ten o'clock. We were to meet outside Aldgate Station, but if we missed each other we would wait in the coffee shop nearby.

She bought me some fish and chips, and as I was saying good-bye she bent down and kissed me. It was the first kiss I can remember. Some boys told me afterwards they had had plenty of kisses from their parents. But I had none from mine. Promising to be on time in the morning I made my way towards the City.

CHAPTER TWO

THERE was a long time to go before I could apply for a bed, but I thought it would be best to find out just where the ship was, so that I could find it quickly when the time came. I went past the Bank, down Queen Victoria Street to the Embankment. There I crossed over to the riverside, and started the long trek to Westminster. The first ship I saw which was moored turned out to be the *President*, a training ship which had nothing to do with giving beds to homeless people. But a man off the boat gave me the information I wanted. He told me that farther down the river was a police boat, and if I went aboard after ten o'clock I would get a bed. This news was rather a disappointment to me, for I thought that if I came in contact with the police they might keep me and send me home. I had the choice of either staying out all night again, or going to the police boat and giving a wrong name. I decided to adopt a new name, so I started walking about to keep warm until ten o'clock. I walked to the Westminster end of the Embankment, turned towards Birdcage Walk, and went on until I found room to sit down on a seat. All the seats I had passed were occupied by men or women, some asleep and others talking. I sat down for a while, but it was so cold that I had to get going again to keep warm.

At last the hour of ten struck, and I made my way towards the ship. I found others already on board. I did not have to wait long before I was called into an office. Question after question was put to me by a man with a big voice and a big head. He wanted to know who I was, what I was, what I had been doing lately, and what I intended to do. He went on to ask about my parents, what they did, and so on.

I was under his cross-examination for twenty minutes before he decided to allow me a shelter for the night, and gave me a letter to take to the "Officer in Charge", the Church Army, Artillery Row, S.W. I found the place just off Victoria Street. When I arrived and handed in my letter I was shown into a small room in which were a table and some chairs.

"You're a young chap to be out at night," said the officer. "How long have you been on this game?" He did not believe me when I told him it was my second night. He gave me some soup and bread, and said: "Here's your supper, but I don't know yet where you can sleep. We have been full all night."

He went away and did not return for some time. By then I had finished my soup, and was waiting to know what I was to do next.

"Here's a blanket. Make yourself as comfortable as you can over there," he told me, pointing to one corner of the room. I sat down on the floor, took my boots off, set them at my head for a pillow, and pulled the blanket over me. I felt very tired, but I could not get to sleep. The floor was hard and my ribs were soon sore. The light was full on, so I

pulled the blanket over my head. As the long hours crept by my only consolation was the belief that next night Kate would find me a bed. Periodically the officer would tramp through the room on his way to other parts of the building, and his boots made noise enough on the bare boards to waken the dead. I heard every hour strike until three o'clock, but after that I must have fallen asleep, for I was awakened by the officer and told to get up and eat my breakfast. I looked around for a lavatory and somewhere to wash. I could find neither. The officer came in and said :

" As you've never been here before you can go now, but if you come here again you'll have to do some wood-sawing for your keep. It's six o'clock. If you take my advice you'll get out of London to-day and keep out. Try joining the Navy. It might make a man of you. Good-morning."

I wished him good-day, and left the place. My legs were stiff. My eyes ached. I was still hungry, so as I had some coppers left I looked for a coffee stall in order to get something to eat. I asked a roadsweeper to tell me of a place, and he directed me to a coffee shop in Great Peter Street. I sat in this shop until eight o'clock, then made my way towards Aldgate. I arrived early, but so did Kate. She looked a lot younger that morning. She was dressed in her woolly tam-o'-shanter and the raincoat, her boots were brightly polished, and in fact she looked quite smart and prosperous. She came up to me and kissed me, and asked if I had had breakfast. I told her I had, and then gave her the story of my poor night's rest.

" Poor kid ! " she said. " But you must have a wash somewhere. I know ; you can get one at King's Cross Station. We're going that way." She led me into Aldgate Station, and took two tickets. " I'll tell you what we shall do to-day when we get into the train," she said.

I had no idea where we were going, or why we were going there. In the train we had a compartment to ourselves.

" Listen, sonny," she asked me. " Would you like me for your mother ? "

The question surprised me. Before I could think of an answer she added :

" If you let people think you're my son I can get enough money to keep us happy."

She went on to tell me that she sang in the streets, but as she had no " bottler " she did not collect as much as she would if someone was helping her. She told me that all I had to do was to walk beside her as she sang, and when anyone came along I was to go cap in hand and ask them to help " mother ".

It seemed easy enough, so I agreed that she should be my " mother ", and I would be her son " Jim ". At King's Cross Station she gave me sixpence to go and have a good wash and clean my boots. To this day I don't know the district we went to, but it was a good one. Kate could sing beautifully. We were in a suburban side street when she started singing " The Rosary ", her clear voice ringing out in the quiet road. She walked very slowly, her arm resting on my shoulder. Before we had gone far a window opened, and someone threw a handful of coppers into the street. I pounced upon them and placed

them in my cap. Other windows were opened and more money thrown out. Kate came to the end of " The Rosary ", and, after a slight pause during which she whispered that I was to take the money out of my cap and put it in my pocket, she started on : " When I Survey the Wondrous Cross."

An old lady was coming towards us carrying a shopping basket. When she was within three yards Kate gave me a little squeeze on the shoulder, which was a pre-arranged signal for me to go up to the person and ask for " help for mother ". The old lady stopped and listened to Kate.

" Your mother sings very well, my lad," she remarked. " She ought not to be begging while she has that voice. Why, it's better than any of our ladies of the church choir."

Kate must have been listening hard, because as soon as the old lady mentioned the word " church " she came up to her and said :

" I shall be grateful for a little help, lady. Just to be able to feed my young Jim and keep him clothed."

The old lady looked at Kate, then at me. " Are you married ? " she asked her.

" A widow, lady. These ten long years. All that time I've had to struggle for Jim and the others, but now there aren't any others. Too many journeys to the graveyard wears on one so, lady." She took out a handkerchief and quietly wiped her eyes. " But Jim's been a good lad, lady, always willing to do his best and a great comfort to me." This time it was the old lady who took out her handkerchief and dabbed her eyes.

" My poor, brave woman, you deserve help. I would rather help a deserving case like you than some of those little fallen hussies the Vicar talked about on Sunday."

" Don't be too hard on the girls, lady. Perhaps they haven't had a chance. If it weren't for the memory of my departed husband and the need to support young Jim I don't know if I'd have the courage to keep pure."

This last touch did the trick. The old lady opened her purse, took out half a sovereign and a half-crown, and gave them to Kate. " That's for food," she said, then, handing me sixpence : " That's for a very good little boy to do what he likes with."

Kate thanked her, and, taking me in her arms, gave me a great kiss. She led me back the way we had come. " Our luck's in, Jim," she remarked. " Let's get away from here and work another district."

Her voice held out well. She sang through several more streets, and I was kept busy picking up the money thrown from the windows, or going up to passers-by to solicit " help for mother ".

The children were coming home from school, so I knew it was after four o'clock. Kate finished the song she was singing, waited a little to see if there were any late pennies to be thrown, then said :

" We'll call it a day ! Now let's go and eat something."

She knew her way about, for in a minute or so we found ourselves in a main road, and a penny ride in a tram brought us to a large coffee shop. We went in. The old man at the counter knew her, and called out :

" Hello, Kate. How's things ? "

" Tough ! " replied Kate. " Chanted all the afternoon for two bob."

Although I had instructions not to mind what she said, I am sure I blushed when I heard this.

" Who's the boy ? " he asked sympathetically.

" Why, this is Jim. Don't you recognize him ? "

" I never knew you had a boy," said the man. " You've never had him out this way before."

" He's been in a home," said Kate, " but I thought you'd have known him."

The man turned away to serve other people. Kate ordered two hot dinners, and as it was late we had to wait until they were cooked. " Keep the money quiet," she whispered to me, " and leave me to pay the bill." The dinners came up. I was hungry, so I enjoyed the meal all the more. She did not say much while we were eating, but made me have some apple pie and custard and a cup of tea. I noticed that when she offered to pay for the meals the man waved her aside and said :

" Some other time if you can, but never if you can't."

We left the shop and walked up the road. Kate told me that we would get a tram farther along, but she did not want to get one until she was out of sight of the coffee shop. We took a tram, then went a short journey by train to Aldgate.

" Well, do you think you'll like being my son ? " she asked when we were alone in the train. I told her I'd be delighted to help her if it meant that we could always eat as we had eaten that day.

" When we get out I've got to buy some food for

to-morrow and Sunday," she said. " I cook on the days we don't work."

I was surprised to find that we would not be out singing every day. I was beginning to get excited, wondering what sort of a home Kate was taking me to. We got out at Aldgate, and I was taken on a shopping expedition. We got parcels of meat, groceries, bread and vegetables. I carried some, but she took the heaviest. It was dark now, and there were lots of people about, so I let her lead and I followed as close behind as I could. In and out of streets we went, until at last we turned into an alley. At the bottom of this alley was a small house, and Kate lived in its front room. She told me that at present we would be the only people in the house, and as the other two rooms had a bad name we were likely to be on our own for some time. She set her parcels down, took a key from her pocket, opened the door and stepped into a narrow passage. Kate's room was the only one on the ground floor. She lit the gas, and before opening the parcels set light to the fire which was already laid. The room was about twelve feet square, very clean, and housed all her home. In one corner was a large bed which was neatly made. There were a large kitchen table and four chairs, the floor was covered with lino, and a hearthrug was stretched in front of the fireplace. I was glad to see a large box filled with coal in one corner. The windows were well curtained with pretty lace curtains, and Kate drew heavier ones across when she had got the fire going.

" Help me to put these things away, Jim, and then we shall have a warm by the fire," she said.

She opened a cupboard which was lined with neatly cut newspaper, and which held everything from food to pots and pans and kindling wood. The fire was going well and the room was warming up fast. She took a chair up to the hearth and told me to do the same. We sat in the warm and gazed into the fire. At last she said :

" If we can do half as well in the future as we have to-day we shan't need to worry. Do you think anyone will come after you, Jim ? "

I told her I did not think so, but even if they did, so long as she needed my help I would give it. She put her arm round me and said :

" You are more use to me than all the louts at the corner pub, and if we keep together we shall be happy."

We talked for a while, and I told her how unhappy I had been at home and how glad I was to be able to make myself useful. She promised she would do her best for me, and we were both happy and contented. The fire was hot, and I soon felt very sleepy. " Poor Jim, I forgot you had no sleep last night," she said as she noticed me dozing. " Here, get to bed, and I'll go and get a little supper for you."

I asked her where I was to sleep. She pulled down the bed-clothes and said :

" In here, of course."

I wondered where she would sleep, but I was too shy to ask. She went out, and I undressed and jumped into bed. In a few minutes she came back with some fish and chips. She put some on a plate for me, leaving the rest on a paper before the fire. She cut a piece of bread, and I sat up and ate my

supper in bed. This was a real luxury to me, and I began to wish she was my real mother. Supper over, she kissed me good-night, and soon I was fast asleep.

It was past eight o'clock when I woke up next morning. But the room was dark, for the blinds were still drawn. To my surprise I found Kate in bed at my side. She was awake, and when I looked at her she smiled at me and said :

" Feel any better, Jim ? I thought you'd never wake up again. You lie still for a bit, and I'll make some tea."

She got out of bed, made a fire and boiled some water. I felt very refreshed after my long sleep. She brought me a cup of tea, remarking : " You can do this for me to-morrow morning ; we shall take turn about." I sat up and drank my tea, while she sat on the edge of the bed. " We won't be going out to-day," she said, " but we shall have a turn to-morrow." After breakfast she asked me to run some errands, after which I would have nothing else to do for the rest of the day. She told me she expected some callers, but said that if I heard anything of the conversation I was not to talk of it to anyone outside. I helped her to clean the room, then went for a walk in order to get used to the neighbourhood.

" Be back by twelve," she said before I went, " and then dinner will be ready."

I did not enjoy my walk, because all the time I was afraid that someone might recognize me and take me back home. I returned at twelve to find dinner just ready. While we were eating our meal

there was a knock at the door. Kate went to see who it was, and came back with the man with the smiling eyes who had sat at the table with us in the coffee shop.

" Hullo, sonny," he cried. " You look busy."

I certainly was busy. Kate could cook, and I was enjoying the result of her efforts.

" Have some dinner, Punch ? " she asked the man.

" No thanks, Kate. I've just had some beer."

He sat down on a chair and asked how we had got on yesterday.

" Our luck was in," Kate told him, " so we won't go out again until to-morrow."

" Ah, Sunday's the day," said Punch. " A good old hymn or two fetches the clods, and there ain't so much competition." He lit a pipe and stared into the fire, while Kate and I went on with our dinner. When we had finished we drew our chairs nearer to the fire, and Kate made some more tea. It was her habit to make tea whenever she found herself with nothing else to do.

While the tea was standing I talked to Punch. It was a good name for him, because his face reminded me of the Punch of Punch and Judy shows. He had a mop of brownish ginger hair on his head, and his beard was the same colour, except that round his chin it was very much darker. Whether this was natural or merely the result of heavy smoking and chewing I could not say. His complexion was very fresh, and matched the colour of his hair. His eyes had a sympathetic expression, and were always twinkling. He was wearing a thick woollen jersey under his jacket.

" Punch " earned a living by breeding and training dogs to hire out to street beggars. For half a crown a day a " Pavement Artist " could hire a puppy or a dog to help him win the pity of the passers-by. " Punch " was very careful to see that only kindly disposed beggars had the dogs. I thought it cruel to the dogs to use them in this manner, and told him so. But he only laughed and said :

" I stand no ill treatment. Why, sonny, the dogs like it, and after all it's nothing to what ' Maria ' at the tavern does. She hires out babies."

I looked across at Kate to see what she thought of it. She must have read my thoughts, for she said :

" Don't be surprised at that, Jim. If the girls weren't to do that they'd have to go to the work-house."

" That's just it," chimed in " Punch ". " And what nice places the ' Unions ' are ! Union is strength we're told, but my experience of our Union is that it's weak all round. Weak soup, weak tea, and weak heads. I don't blame anybody for trying to keep out."

I was rather curious to find out who " Maria " was, and what her " Tavern " was like. It turned out to be a women's lodging-house. " Maria " was a keen business woman. To have a lot of women around with no regular income meant that she would not know until night-time if her beds would be let or not, so she developed a scheme which gave her some degree of security. First she got as many " swag sellers "* and " tappers "† as she could to

* Pedlars. † Beggars.

take beds, and helped them in their various occupations. Then she made a speciality of giving any woman or girl shelter if they had babies, legitimate or otherwise. The " tappers " would hire the babies at two shillings a day, and thus provide the mother with the price of a bed and some food. " Maria " saw to it that the scheme worked smoothly, with the result that her beds were " booked " long before night-time.

She had one failing. She was over partial to gin. At the end of the row in which the "Tavern" stood was a public house. When she was not supervising her lodgers she would be sitting in this pub drinking gin or beer. When she was " full " of gin she would behave strangely. Often she would go back to her " Tavern " and declare that her lodgers had not paid for their beds, and so try to collect payment twice. But one night she was so drunk that she gave everyone their bed-money back, and told them to clear out. Then, to everybody's amazement she broke down and cried, asked for forgiveness, and let them all have their beds without further payment. Rumour has it that people tried to ensure a repetition of that incident by supplying " Maria " with all the drink she could consume. But the only one to gain was " Maria ", who was never known to break down again.

One of the many queer characters I met at " Maria's Tavern " was " Lady Dorothy ". She was a young woman of very fresh complexion, who had never been known to fail in any of her exploits in the " Charity Hound " racket. I first met her a day or two after I had joined Kate. She had come round

to borrow some tea and sugar. Kate could always be relied upon to have a small reserve of groceries, so she had many callers for " just one mashing ".

" Lady Dorothy " took an interest in me right away. She asked if she could take me for a walk one day, but Kate was wary.

" We're busy over the week-end," she said. " But what do you want him for ? "

" I'll see you later about it," said " Lady Dorothy ". " Thanks for the tea." Away she went, and I did not see her again for a day or two. But then Kate told me we would be going for a walk with " Lady Dorothy ", and she would bring me round some new clothes. The clothes proved to be a complete sailor suit, and the two women had a glorious half-hour fitting them on me. I had no idea what the clothes were for, and as I looked quite smart in them I kept quiet and asked no questions. When I was fully dressed the two women put on their hats and coats, and the three of us went for our walk.

We walked to " Gardiners' Corner ", then went by tram to Globe Road, and walked to Victoria Park. When we reached the park gates Kate and I sat on a seat, and " Lady Dorothy " went off. Only then did Kate let me into the great secret.

" She might want you to walk alone with her soon, Jim, but don't be afraid, I shall be near," she told me.

I couldn't make out why this was to happen, so Kate told me she was helping a friend. A little later " Lady Dorothy " came back and said : " They're in now, so everything is all right." She turned to me and added : " Come on, Jim, let's go for a drink."

She took me to a public house at the gate of the park, bought me a lemonade, and had a glass of stout herself. We drank our drinks, and in a few minutes were back in the park.

" All right ? " asked Kate.

" Yes," she replied. " He looked surprised, but thank God he didn't come over."

" We'll get back, then," said Kate, taking hold of my arm. We walked to the main road together and then we separated, Kate and I taking one tram, and " Lady Dorothy " another in the opposite direction.

Next day, when we had been back from work for about half an hour, " Lady Dorothy " came to the house. She was all excited and jubilant. Kate and she talked fast and long, and from the things I heard it appeared that " Lady Dorothy " would have her rent paid for six months and would be " in funds " for a considerable time. When we were alone Kate told me what had really happened. " Lady Dorothy " had made application to a " Charity " as a sailor's widow in distress. She found she was up against one of the " hard boiled " type of charity committees, and hurriedly had to add some " sob stuff " to her story. The tale she invented was that to avoid further distress to herself, and to prevent unhappiness to her son who would be home from sea in a day or two, she needed to clear the arrears in her rent book, to get her clothes out of pawn, and re-stock her cupboard with food. With the aid of fake references and a fake rent book she had all but broken down the stubborn resistance of the charity committee.

But she was hard put to it when a retired officer

on the committee started asking questions about the son. Although she pleaded pitifully on behalf of her " son " she was rudely told that they did not believe she had a son at sea at all. She was abruptly dismissed, but not before she had warned them that her blood and that of her " son " would be upon their heads. It looked as though she had met her first defeat in the charity racket, but her visit to Kate had put an idea into her head. As is usual with this type of woman, she had a store of information regarding the habits of the various charity committee members. One such piece of information was that the ex-officer regularly drank at the pub by the gate of the park. She bought the sailor suit on " Tally " for a few shillings, and took me for the walk. The same evening she returned to the pub and, pretending to be intoxicated, made pertinent remarks regarding the way certain charity officials disposed of the funds subscribed for the widows and orphans of the men who " go down to the sea in ships ".

Within the hearing of the ex-officer she told her story to the occupants of the " Saloon Bar ". After losing her husband in a storm at sea, she had, that very day, seen her only boy set sail for a voyage that would last about a year. Naturally the men, who knew the committee man, called him over, believing they had found a deserving case to receive help from the funds to which they themselves had liberally subscribed.

Anxious not to do anything which might show up his committee, the committee man agreed to make himself responsible for the welfare of this " poor

distressed widow ". But " Lady Dorothy " wanted more than his sympathetic words, so she very guardedly suggested that since she had been turned down once it wouldn't be much use making further application. He did not want his pub friends to hear how this woman's case had been turned down, so he invited her to have something to eat with him. Not only had she got an expensive supper out of him, but she had gone home with him that night. In the morning it was easy for her to explain the advantage of his supporting her case when it came up for review because, as she told Kate :

" I said to him, ' After all, it isn't your money you give away, and you wouldn't really like the ladies on the committee to know that I stayed with you last night.' "

The result of that little bit of blackmail was that the case was reviewed, and, on the assurance of the ex-officer that he had made extensive private enquiries and had formed the opinion that they had made a great mistake in turning the case down, the committee decided to grant a sum sufficient to clear off the arrears of rent, to redeem the pawned clothes, and to pay for food. Moreover, her case was to remain on the relief list until her son's return, then an attempt would be made to find shore work for him, so that he could help towards his " mother's " maintenance.

When not working the charities " Lady Dorothy " would work various minor swindles. I helped in one without knowing exactly what had happened until I told Kate of it. With the aid of a neatly written letter purporting to come from a good class London

address, accepting the terms of service for a maid, and giving detailed arrangements for starting work, she would arrive at a house complete with a box of clothes but no money. On hearing that there must be some mistake she would break down and cry, and then tell how she had spent her last savings to come to the place, and say that all she could do now was either to start walking home to the North of England or go on the streets to get the train fare.

Usually she got some money, as she did the night she gave me a shilling for carrying her box to the corner of the street in which her next victim lived. But Kate told me of a time when this shark worked her trick on an address which turned out to be a bachelor's flat. It was not known what happened when she arrived, but it ended up by the gentleman driving her to the station in a taxi, buying her a ticket to her alleged home, and keeping up a conversation right up to the time the train started. " Lady Dorothy " found herself travelling northwards when she had no desire to leave London. She got out of the train at the first stop somewhere in the Midlands, and had to pay her fare back.

Kate and I were getting along quite well, and had now been together for a few weeks. Money came in easily, so we ate good food and paid many visits to the pictures. One night she looked worried. I had heard some shouting in the alley during the evening, but did not connect it with her. As she sat by the fire I could see there was something the matter, so I tried my best to console her. After a while I got out of her what the trouble was.

Some of the so-called respectable women of the

alley had been talking about us. One of them, who was always to be found at mothers' meetings and such like, had been attacking Kate for, as she said, leading a young lad up the wrong path. Since this woman had the power of influencing certain " social workers " because of her church connections, she was highly respected by the inhabitants of the alley. As far as the rest of the women in the district were concerned what this woman said was accepted publicly as the truth, no matter what their inward convictions might be. For it was known that a word from her to the priest would be enough to stop the delivery of charity coal or blankets to any house in the alley.

How the idea entered the mind of this " mission beggar " of a woman I cannot say, but she made it her job to be the moral teacher of the alley, and set the people wondering what were the real reasons why Kate was harbouring me under her roof.

Minds that had been nurtured on " charity soup " and gin supplied by anyone at the corner pub found it easy to think of a dozen reasons for this apparent kidnapping. Their imaginations worked so actively that the obvious action consequent on their temporary belief would have been to call in the police. But in spite of their church connections, the life they led and the conditions of their homes were such that there were none who would have welcomed a police visit within a mile of them. The result was that they just talked, their gossip got to Kate's ears, and the shouting I had heard was because Kate had smacked the " Mission woman's " face for saying bad things about her.

Kate was worried for a long time. I tried to tell her not to mind, but simply could not think of the words. That evening the priest called. He started asking questions about me, and she got wild with him.

" Go and question some of the old hags of your congregation," she said. " We are all right here, and we don't want any of you busybodies nosing into our affairs. If Jim wants to tell you anything he can, but for my part you can go to Hell and meet some of the poor souls you have driven there."

The priest, who was a fat double-chinned monster of a man, raised his stick to me and said :

" I want to know who you are, where you come from, and what you are doing here. Come now. Tell me quickly."

Though it frightened me for a time, his attitude only made me hate him, and I resolved not to tell him anything. Kate stepped between us and looked the priest straight in the eye.

" As much as one tap or any attempt at it will be enough for me to break every bone in your body. Get out of here as soon as you can," she ordered him.

He went out, but through the window we saw that he stayed to get as much tittle-tattle as he could from the neighbours in the alley.

I am sure that this interfering priest was the cause of my losing my best home and of Kate being sent to prison for two years. Even now I do not know exactly what happened, and all my efforts to find out have been fruitless. However, she was arrested with others on a charge of shop-breaking. From the little evidence I did collect I know that Kate could not have been guilty, because at the times she was

supposed to be stealing she was either at home or at the pictures with me. But although the police knew that I was staying with her, they refused to let me give evidence. If I had known as much then as I know now I would have forced my way into court and told the magistrate what I knew of Kate, and how it was impossible for her to be guilty of the charge. She went to prison, and I never set eyes on her again. I did return to the alley to tell the old women what I thought of them, but circumstances did not allow of my staying long.

When I arrived the women were all bunched together talking excitedly. I guessed they were talking of Kate, and this infuriated me. I called after them, accusing them of telling lies about Kate and me, and at the sight of the " mission beggar " I picked up a stone from the ground and hurled it through her front room window.

I ran and ran, the women after me, but my body was strong, owing to Kate's good feeding and kindness, and I was easily able to outrun the gin-sodden harlots who were pretending to be respectable.

CHAPTER THREE

THE shock I got when I realized that I was again homeless was greater than any other I have experienced. I could hardly believe that I would not see Kate that night as usual. I know I cried, but for how long I cannot say. I came to myself in Trafalgar Square, sitting among other destitute people on a seat.

It was at this time that I learned of the night life of the destitute. A night in Trafalgar Square is something which sticks in the memory. Every night in the week here gathers the most motley crew that could be brought together in any city. Old and young men and women, many of whom have not slept in a bed for months, and who would not do so if they had the chance, come here to receive charity from those who think they are doing well by giving alms.

I noticed that the people who received most were those who were disgustingly filthy. It may be that they deliberately allow themselves to get into such a vile condition, knowing that they will get preferential treatment when begging. The night I was there a lady came round giving out bread and cheese sandwiches, and when I had received mine I got up and went for a walk. I wandered down to the Embankment and stood looking into the river. I had not been there long when a young man came up to me and handed me a parcel of food. I opened

it and found it to be half a chicken, some potatoes, and some brown bread and butter.

This was my first introduction to the many men who do such kindly acts without publicity. Waiters and cooks who work until the early hours of the morning make a practice of wrapping up some food to take to the Embankment. Without any show or desire for notoriety, these men do their good work and go home, unnoticed by any but those who receive their gifts. What a blessing it would be if the charity organizations would work in such a quiet way, instead of parading their work before the public !

Another group of people who are friends to the destitute are the printers of Fleet Street. Every morning about 3.30 a.m. destitute men gather round the doors of some large printing firm and wait for the workers to leave. It is the custom for any printer who has a parcel of food left to give it to the men at the door. Some give coppers as well, so that the lucky receiver can get some tea also. Getting my food in this way and sleeping in the libraries or parks during the day time, I spent several days in London. Sometimes having plenty to eat, and at other times going very hungry, I roamed the streets, caring little what happened to me. I slowly learned the ropes, and the more I learned the more I realized that I must do something to prevent my growing like the old men and women around me.

I had been out all night and had wandered to Billingsgate Fish Market, hoping to earn a few coppers by pushing barrows up the hill to Eastcheap. My luck was in. Four times I was able to respond

to the fish porter's cry, " Up the hill, up the hill," and my reward was fourpence in real hard cash.

I was glad I had been told of this method of earning a few coppers. At 3 a.m. on a winter's morning a hot cup of tea and some bread and dripping are very acceptable. Like most jobs of work, there is plenty of competition, but if you stuck to it you could be sure of two pushes, if not more. Every push earns a penny, and every penny means a cup of tea or two slices of bread and dripping.

The job was very simple. I waited at the bottom of the hill until a porter came along with his barrow. If he had no favourites already waiting, he would shout : " Up the hill." All who had been waiting for that call would jump behind the barrow and push like mad. Only three could be kept on, and the porters would often get the benefit of six or seven pushing until, by means of shoulder charges, kicks, shouting and swearing and any other method that occurred to any of the pushers, the number had been reduced to three.

Although the reward was only a penny, it is astounding what one would do in order to keep a grip upon the barrow. When you are chilled to the bone and hungry and tired and there is the prospect of a penny, all gentleness, morality and politeness go by the board.

That morning I was lucky in being able to hold on four times, thus being enriched to the tune of fourpence.

I went to a coffee shop, ordered a large tea and four slices of bread and dripping, and looked hopefully towards the fire. This coffee shop had a great

reputation. If you could get by the fire before 5 a.m. you stood a good chance of having four or five hours of warmth and comfort.

Again I was in luck. As I approached the form which stood in front of the fire, a very coarse-voiced gent called out :

" Blimey, you have been working hard, son—a large tea and four. You'd better come and take my seat and enjoy it."

As my unexpected friend stood up there was a general rush to capture the vacant seat. But my benefactor was strong not only in voice but also in limb, a fact which was respected by all present. I sat down before the fire and started on my breakfast.

I remember my great feeling of satisfaction as I took a big gulp of hot tea and a mouthful of delicious bread and dripping. I also remember some very rude remarks being passed concerning one who had just come in and was allowed a seat at once. But I was too pleased with myself to care whether these remarks were addressed to me, and too busy with my breakfast to pay much attention to those around.

The heat of the fire turned into sunshine. The men were transformed into well-fed holiday-makers, and we were having a really nice time at the seaside, when a big voice boomed into my ear :

" Come on, boy-oh, this is a coffee shop, not a doss house."

As I slowly realized where I was, I heard the clock strike 9 a.m. Remembering that there was a library just across London Bridge, I made my way there. I was not very interested in the papers or magazines, but I had heard that a number of

London's outcasts gathered here every morning to make plans for the day. I had heard mysterious words like " Spikes ", and " Free Kips " and " Hand Outs ", and I wanted to know more about them. I did not have the courage to approach one of them for the information, so I decided to pick out a few and to follow them wherever they went. I laid my plans well and had everything set for the great adventure. But alas, those I decided to follow remained seated at my table.

I wondered and waited. Would they ever go ? Did they ever eat ? The answer came before I expected it. One very lean and lanky boy turned to his pal and said :

" Raining like hell, nothing this morning. We shall have to wait for Rambling Katie's this afternoon."

I did not know what this meant, but I realized that the next move would be in the afternoon. So I took a large volume from the shelf and pretended to read. I must have dropped off to sleep, for I remembered nothing until I woke in the middle of the afternoon.

The boys I had decided to follow were gone. In fact, as the rain had stopped, there were only a few genuine readers left. I wanted to go out myself. But where to ?

While struggling with this problem of trying to decide where to go when I had nowhere to go to, a youngster slid into the chair next to mine.

" On the floor, mate ? " he asked. " Of course, I can see you are. Why ask such a silly question ? " he went on without giving me a chance to reply.

He looked at my clothes. His nose wrinkled up. "Phew!" he whistled. "Been up to the market this morning? You smell like a dozen fish porters all on a summer's day."

I was feeling a little ashamed of myself, but at the same time I resented his advances, so I tried to say something. I had little chance. This boy soon showed me that he could do all the necessary talking, and then some.

"Ever been in a Spike?" was his next question.

I told him that until I knew what a "Spike" was I would be unable to answer that question. He explained that "Spike" was the slang term for a casual ward. It was a place where one could get a free bed and some food. He advised me to apply at the Night Office on the Embankment at 10 p.m. that night. This was good news to me, and I said I would take his advice.

"That's the idea!" he said. "Make the government keep yer if they won't find work, and then this nonsense of sleeping out will be finished with."

I was greatly "bucked" by this talk, and felt a little sorry when he got up to go. I could not help noticing that he looked clean, and did not walk with the tired slouch which seemed to be the hall mark of London's "down and outs". I looked up at the time. It was just 5 o'clock: five hours before I could make my application for food and bed.

Bed! Why, it was some nights since I had last taken off my clothes and slept in one. Wouldn't I enjoy the bed to-night! And food! It really sounded too good to be true. Anyway, I would go. With my mind fully made up I left the library and

walked and walked and walked, waiting for the hour of 10 p.m. The hours passed by. The evening came on. The night turned colder and colder. A fog enveloped everything until it was almost impossible to see where you were going.

Damp and cold, feeling extremely hungry, I walked slowly alongside a never-ending wall. A policeman had told me to keep close to it and to go on until I passed under Hungerford Bridge.

At last I came to a bridge and saw some people waiting for a tram. I asked them for my best way. "The next bridge you come to," said a kindly voice, and off I went, keeping close to the wall. Under the next bridge I saw a policeman standing by a lamp-post. I asked him where the Night Office was. He gave me a stern look and said: "Got a ticket?" "No," I said. From his pocket he took a small card disc about the size of half a crown, and wrote his number and the time on it. "Take this across there," he said, pointing to the other side of the road, "You'll see my mate there, and he'll show you where to go."

Thanking him, I went across to the other policeman.

"Got any money?" this one asked.

"Only fivepence," I replied.

"All right, get in there."

Then I realized that "Get in there" referred to the same place to which I had made application the day I met Kate. I found two other destitutes waiting to be interviewed.

"Been in before?" asked one of them. I nodded.

"Too bad," he said. "He's mad to-night."

Before I could make any reply a bell rang, and the young man who had spoken to me passed into the office. His companion went in soon after, and I was left alone. A policeman looked through the door and said :

" Your turn next when the bell rings."

It was fully fifteen minutes before my turn came. When I went in I found three men, two of whom were sitting at tables and one standing by a cabinet full of little cards. I handed my disc to one at a desk. Staring at me, he said : " Didn't I tell you not to come here again ? "

I was about to explain that I had never seen him before when the other began to ask me questions. I was cross-examined as to my age, birthplace, occupation, my parents and their work, my schooling and what work had I done and when. Then followed questions regarding the Army and Navy, workhouses and charity homes. Only when the man at the cabinet said he had no record of me under the particulars I had given, did my questioner take breath and rest a while. When he started again, he took down my height, colour of hair, eyes and clothes, and asked me if I had any identification marks on my body. He suspected me of being someone named Harry Sharp, but, failing to find a tattoo mark below my elbow, they went farther afield in their search for other marks. I was accused of being nine different persons hailing from as far north as Glasgow and as far west as Cardiff. At last, for registration purposes, they accepted the particulars I had given them, and proceeded to give me a lecture on the subject of what happens to a

man who makes the unfortunate mistake of repeating his application to the Night Office. After this lecture I was handed a letter addressed to the Superintendent of one of the London Casual Wards.

By enquiring from policemen and others I at last found myself outside a pair of solid doors, over which was a lamp, with the words " Casual Ward " painted on it.

I rang the bell. After a few minutes a porter peered through the grid and asked me what I wanted. I showed the letter, and he opened the door and let me in. I was anxious to know what would happen next, and did not have long to wait.

" Sit down there," he grumbled. " A nice time of the night to be coming in, I must say." As he spoke he moved towards a small office. I was in a hall about fifteen feet square. On one side was the door through which I had entered, while close to it were some steps leading to a passage. The seat on which I was sitting was at right angles to the door and steps, and right in front of me was the small office, with a large bench and cupboard alongside it. I was speculating what was in the cupboard, when the porter opened the small window of his office and called me. I noticed a clock : the time was 1.30 a.m.

" Ever been here before ? " he asked.

" No," I said.

" Ever been in any casual ward in London ? " was the next question.

" No."

" Oh, well, listen to this," he said, taking a deep breath and swelling with pride in his own importance. " If you stay here you'll be detained two nights

you'll be put to work in the morning you'll be searched and all articles taken from you and may be returned when you leave you'll have a bath and if necessary your clothes will be fumigated. Do you intend to stay here ? "

" Yes," I replied, suppressing my amazement that so much could be said without taking a breath.

" Very well, then, put your knife, tobacco, matches, snuff, pipes, razors, razor blades and any food you may have on that bench, together with any packets, papers, letters and any other articles and property you may possess. Have you any money ? "

" Yes," I replied. " I have fivepence."

" You have, have you ? Then hand it to me. It will go towards the cost of your maintenance while you are here."

He took the money and started to look over my property. No matter how personal the article was, his hands went over everything. He opened some letters I was keeping for memory's sake, and even went page by page through a magazine I had picked up some time before. This did not satisfy him, for he turned to me and went through every pocket I had, turning the linings inside out in his desire to find some tobacco dust or matches. At last he gave up the search and went into his office again. I glanced at the clock ; it was 1.45 a.m. He opened a huge ledger and wrote something in it.

" What is your name ? " he asked. " Your age and occupation ? Where you slept last night and where you're going to when you leave ? "

After taking down my answers he handed me a piece of string with a metal tab on it.

" Tie this on your property and leave it on the bench. This way," he said as he brushed past me. Going up the stairs, he led me to a small room and gave me a cup of cocoa, some bread with a square of margarine on it, and a wooden knife.

My heart sank. Gone was my dream of something nice to eat. However, my hunger had to be appeased, so I took a gulp of cocoa and ate the bread. The porter returned, carrying a nightshirt with a piece of string and metal tab tied round it similar to the one I had tied round my property.

" Here's your nightshirt," he said. " And tie it up like this in the morning. Your bath is ready when you are."

Tired as I was, this sounded good, so I followed him to the bathroom.

" Take your clothes off here, hang them inside out on those hooks, and get into this bath," he said. I started undressing, and expected him to retire. But no ! He stayed where he was like a cat watching its prey. I stripped naked. As I was getting into the bath he made a grab at my clothes and began another search. This time he not only went through my pockets but made a minute search for vermin.

I really enjoyed my bath. I had not had my clothes off for several days, and the soft warm water was comforting to my flesh. I was tempted to stay in the water a little longer than was necessary, and this again brought the porter's wrath down on my head.

" Come on," he called, " it's nearly time for you to be getting up, not going to bed."

This I took for an example of Poor Law Official's humour, so I made no reply.

" This way," he yelled. He led me down a long stone passage lined with small doors with peepholes in them. At the very end he stopped at one which was open.

" Get in there and make your bed down quickly," he said. Before I could look around to see where I was the door was shut upon me and I was locked up alone, in a cell. There was a faint light, and I could just make out a bundle of blankets on a rolled-up mattress. I unfolded the blankets, unrolled the bed, and without even a good-night thought for the cantankerous porter I fell asleep.

It was still dark when I was awakened by a lot of noise produced by the banging of doors. My bones ached, I had a pain in my head. I felt that I had not been to sleep at all. Gradually the noise came nearer and nearer, until it was the door of my cell that was being banged. It suddenly opened, and in shot the ugly head of the porter who had received me the previous night.

" Still in bed, you lazy scamp ? " he cried. " Here it is five o'clock and all but you at breakfast." As he was talking he advanced into my cell and, with a swift tug, swept all the blankets off me. " Get yourself washed and up to breakfast," he said. " Some of you think this is a hotel, but I'll show you it isn't."

My temper was rising fast. I took a quick glance around to find something to throw at him, but nothing was at hand. How I longed for a stick or my boots, so that I could show this great bully that I was not really frightened of him. I began to feel cold. I looked round for my clothes. They were

not in the cell. The last I had seen of them was when I took them off in the bathroom. I was making my way there to get them when I noticed a bundle on the steps at the end of the passage. This bundle proved to be my clothes, so I hurriedly dressed, got a wash and went in search of breakfast.

I was shown into a large room with two big tables in it. There were about forty men at the tables, and each had a metal plate and a mug in front of him. I was told there would be a plate and a mug for me too, so I looked for them. I was unable to find them, so I went to the door to ask the porter where they were. To my amazement the door through which I had just come was locked.

" What's the matter, pal ? " asked an old man who I guessed to be over seventy years of age.

" I can't find my breakfast," I told him, " so I'm going to ask the porter where it is."

" Ask the porter ! " he exclaimed. " My son, you don't know what you're doing for yourself. Leave this to me." He rose from his seat and gave one great shout :

" Hi ! "

All talking stopped, and there was silence.

" Who stole this kid's tommy ? "

Still silence.

" What son of a scoundrel has robbed this kid of his breakfast ? "

Several became uneasy and looked at one another. There was a slight movement in one corner, and it did not pass unnoticed by the old man.

" Hey ! You in the corner ! " he shouted. " What have you got under your seat ? "

Sure enough it was a plate and a mug. But both were empty.

" I thought it was a spare one," cried the man in the corner.

" You thought nothing of the kind," the old man retorted. " Here, give the kid what's on your plate. I guess it's his anyway."

Luckily for me the man in the corner had not long started on my breakfast, or I would have had much less than I had. My tea had half gone and was cold, but the bread and margarine had hardly been touched. I was looking for a place where I could sit down and eat, when the old man shouted for me to go and sit near him. I was delighted, for I had already made up my mind to make friends with him, and I was glad to have somebody to talk to.

" Sit down here, son," he said, moving a little to make room for me. " Been on this game long ? " he asked. I told him it was the first time I had been in a casual ward, but did not think it would be the last, though I hoped it was.

" Ah ! the old story. You think you'll rise again," he gave me a gentle smile. " Of course you will if you fight. But if you give in you're done for." He turned from me to the man sitting next to him. " Keep him in line, Tom," I heard him say, and, curious to know who Tom was, I glanced in his direction.

What a surprise I had ! Tom was none other than my friend of the Library. He gave me a kindly smile, and said :

" This is better than sleeping out, isn't it ? "

" Yes, but I don't like the way the porter treated me," I replied.

" Well, all that's got to be changed," said Tom. " I'll have a talk with you later on. Don't get yourself into trouble."

Having said this, he went straight across to a window, opened it as far as it would go, and crawled through it. I had hardly recovered from my surprise when the old man spoke to me again :

" Good fellow, young Tom. If he can't do you any good he won't do you any harm."

I was glad to hear the old chap speak well of Tom, because I wanted to make friends with them both.

I heard a distant clock chime six.

" What happens next ? " I asked the old chap.

" Oh, nothing till eight o'clock," he said. " That's the worst of the London spikes. They get us up at five, and we have nothing to do until eight. It makes the day drag so. Do you smoke ? " he asked suddenly.

" No," I said. " And a good job too, for I'd have had mine taken from me last night."

" You've got a lot to learn yet. I get mine in, but not through the front door."

As he was speaking a window slowly opened, and in crawled Tom. He went to about ten others before he came to us, and each received a small paper packet. From the old man I learned that overnight the " Fellowship boys " club together and make a parcel of contraband, passing it through the railings or over the wall. In the morning one of them goes out into the yard to recover it. And that was where Tom had been. I was curious to know who the

" Fellowship boys " were, and discovered that a number of tramps had banded together in a kind of organization for fellowship and co-operative assistance to one another.

I glanced round the room. It was very large and high. There were plenty of windows, but all except the one Tom crawled through were either nailed up or were barred like the windows of prisons. I rather suspected that the window he used should have been nailed as well. The walls were bare, except for a large printed notice containing extracts from the Poor Law Regulations governing Casual Wards. The old man saw my eyes fixed on this.

" Get that off by heart, son. It's useful," he said, smiling. " And when you know that lot there's plenty more for the asking."

I went over to the notice. It was dated, but I could not make out what the date was.

" That's a relic of Good Queen Bess," said a voice near me. " 1601, and we still live by it ! "

I looked round to see who was speaking. It was a middle-aged man with a splendid crop of ginger hair. His voice was soft and gentle. He stood by me and ran his finger over the notice.

" If all this had to be crossed out and re-written in a condensed form I would recommend : ' If you are poor you shall be punished,' " he remarked.

I stared hard at the notice. The date seemed to fascinate me. 1601 was a long time ago, and if they had to make rules for unemployed men as far back as that, then unemployment was not caused through modern industrial conditions. I went back to the old man to ask his view of the matter.

" Sixteen Hundred ! " he said. " Why as far back as A.D. 350 England was faced with a vagrancy problem." He looked at me fixedly and asked : " Did you learn much history at school ? "

" Oh, yes," I answered. " I learnt a lot of battles on land and sea. And I might be able to remember the names of England's Kings and Queens."

" Well, did you learn anything about the people of Britain ? What they were like ? How they lived, and what they did for a living ? "

I thought for a moment, and had to admit that I did not know much about that sort of history.

" Well, if you like . . . it'll pass an hour away . . . I'll tell you something of the history of vagrancy in this country."

He untied a handkerchief, took out a pipe, some tobacco and matches and lit up. " Don't be afraid," he said. " I shan't get caught." He settled himself comfortably, and started off on his talk.

" When I say ' vagrant ' I mean a man who has no home or income, and is compelled to seek his livelihood day by day. He is the most tragic expression of a rotten society. There are many reasons for his existence, but the chief one is poverty. Years ago, in the third and fourth centuries, when conditions for the working man were really bad, one might have become a vagrant by running away from slavery. Of course, at that time if you didn't have a master the only way you could live was by plunder or charity. Even in those days the real men refused charity, so stealing was their only hope. Quite a lot were driven on to the road through sickness or old age. Some went because their crops had failed, and

of course there was always the man running away from justice. And some went on tramp because they just had a kink for it.

" So you see, with all these circumstances, the highways of this country were filled with vagrants. The monasteries were open in those days, and many a good feed and shelter was provided by them. I have read somewhere that the monks were considered to be a bad influence because of their generosity ; but even with all the help from the churches or from private persons the main body of the vagrants had to rely on plunder.

" Things got so bad that laws had to be passed to allow townfolk to put people into stocks if they had no settled place to live ; and many a man has been in the stocks for seventy hours just because he was a tramp like us."

" But I'm not a tramp ! " I interrupted.

" Oh well, you may not think so ; but you wait, son ! Anyhow, there's one thing in common between the gaffers of to-day and the gaffers then. They could not get it into their thick heads that a man was forced on the roads and did not choose that life, and every time anything has been done to try to alter the conditions it has always been by the method of punishing the vagrant rather than abolishing vagrancy. For instance, in King Alfred's time, about A.D. 890, a law was passed that not only punished the vagrant but also punished the citizen who helped him. Even in spite of this harsh treatment things got worse. There was no chance at that time of getting work unless you became a serf to a baron. Things were bad right up to 1066. You

may remember that date, because William the Conqueror was busy at the time. Just about then slavery was being abolished on the Continent, and many of the freed slaves were coming over here.

" You will notice as you grow older that the British Governments have always been willing to help a stranger rather than deal with the home problem first. Well, as these foreigners were coming over something had to be done. Most of them were Flemish and were useful in the wool trade, in fact this invasion of the foreigners really made the wool industry that we know to-day. The people settled in towns and started working wool. This, of course, made more work, and so the vagrants left the hills in droves, and came to town in search of employment.

" This migration from the hills and the highways also encouraged many peasant slaves to leave their masters and come to town. This started the trouble between the big landlords and the townsmen who wanted to build up industry. Things got so bad through the slaves running away and their masters fetching them back that a law was passed with a clause in it like this : ' Also if slaves shall have remained unclaimed for a year and a day in our Cities, Boroughs, Walled Towns or Castles, from that day let them be made free from the yoke of their slavery for ever.' That is supposed to be the beginning of our freedom. You may not think much of it when you're in your cell at night, but it's the law !

" The freeing of the slaves caused still more trouble for the townsfolk, and by the year 1359, in

spite of all the cruelties of the stocks and the prisons, there were so many vagrants that it became necessary to issue what is now known as the ' City of London Proclamation '. Unemployed men of that time were given three days in which to quit the city. Where they were to go to they weren't told. It was either get out of London or be placed in the stocks and be branded in the ear.

" You'll notice if you stay in this game long that the government of to-day is still carrying on this foolish policy of getting rid of the vagrants as soon as possible. I suppose they feel that if we are out of sight we shall be out of mind. But what they fail to see is that if we go out of sight of one locality it can only be to go into another.

" Round about Richard's time, 1388, people were making further investigations into the problem, and found that there was yet another cause developing and driving men to live a roaming life. With all the men clamouring for work in the towns the masters realized that they could get labour very cheap, so cheap in fact, that the wages paid were not enough to raise the workmen above their old slave conditions. The result was that laws had to be passed fixing wages for workmen. Those laws may be considered as the first step towards the guaranteed wages which some people enjoy to-day.

" This fixing of wages may have been all right for those who had work to do, but it was not much use to those who were still left without employment. In 1495 Henry the Seventh tried a new way of settling the difficulty. He divided the men into two sections: (*a*) unemployed able-bodied men, (*b*) unemployed

infirm. He ordered the stocks and punishment for able-bodied men, and ordered the infirm to return to the place of their birth. He further ordered that if any of the infirm unemployed did not return to their birthplace they were to be treated in the same way as the able-bodied. Here, again, you see the old policy of punishment for being poor. Instead of finding work for those who wanted it the authorities treated the destitute as if they were criminals.

" Henry the Eighth tried a new way of solving the problem ; he ordered all vagrants to return to their birthplace, and issued passes to the men entitling them to receive food and lodging for one night only from parishes on the way. If any still refused to leave the towns, they received a whipping for the first offence, and if that did not do the trick, their right ear was cut off and they were taken to their native places. Here again you see that cruelty was resorted to in order to right a social evil.

" It was during the reign of Henry the Eighth, about 1536, that the monasteries in this country were closed. You remember I told you that many thousands of vagrants relied on the Church for their livelihood. When these places were shut down, all those who had been in receipt of their charity were thrown on to the highways and byways to swell the numbers already there. In 1557, a novel scheme was tried. ' Licences to Beg ' were issued.

" You'll have noticed that so far all effort to deal with the poverty problem was by way of throwing the burden of maintaining the destitute upon private charitable people. It was Queen Elizabeth who first tried to deal with the vagrants in a commonsense

way. She held, in 1601, that if there was any man without work because he could find no master, it was the duty of the State to find the tools and a supply of raw materials, and set the man to earn his own living.

" This idea was never given a chance to develop. But the principle of State Relief was accepted, and that was the beginning of the ' Poor Law ' as we know it to-day. Even when this principle was accepted the administrators could not get away entirely from the old policy of punishment and amputation. In 1609-10 there were famous deportations to Virginia. Of course the same policy is carried out to-day, but it's called ' emigration ' now.

" In the reign of George the Third, 1750, unemployed men who were receiving State Relief were hired out to townsmen at four shillings per week. All the goods produced by these men were taken by the hirer, so the net result to the unemployed man was no different from the conditions of slavery which their forefathers had endured.

" During this time the workhouse system was being developed, and by 1773 you could see how really brutal governments can be when they are dealing with the destitute. I remember reading something written in the year 1773 by Mr. John Scott, a Quaker. It was this :

" ' A thorough acquaintance with the interior of these wretched receptacles of misery, or rather Parish Prisons called Workhouses, is not easily to be acquired ; in these as in other arbitrary governments, complaint is mutiny and treason, to every appearance of which a double portion of punishment

is invariably annexed ; particular incidents, shocking to humanity, may have sometimes transpired ; but the whole mystery of iniquity perhaps never has been nor ever will be developed. One thing is too publicly known to admit denial : that workhouses are scenes of filthiness and confusions ; that old and young, sick and healthy, are promiscuously crowded into ill-conditioned compartments not of sufficient capacity to contain with convenience half the number of miserable beings condemned to such deplorable inhabitations.'

" This Mr. Scott would not have to change many of his words if he was alive to describe the workhouse of to-day."

I was very interested in this historical talk. So much so, in fact, that I had not noticed the entrance of a porter carrying a piece of paper. He began to call out names. As each man answered his name he was told his task for the day. Some had to wash out cells, some scrub the woodwork ; several went to the laundry, and others had various domestic jobs given them. I was told off for the wood-shed. I followed ten others into a shed which had a corrugated iron roof ; half of the floor was laid with stone. Along one side were several cells, in which were quantities of chopped sticks and two large wooden blocks. In front of each was a sawing horse, and a heap of wood which had obviously been collected from demolition works.

Another porter who claimed the magnificent title of " Labour Master " came out to the shed and issued tools. Three old men were given a chopper each, six were handed a bow saw, and two had a

bundle of twine with which to tie up the sticks. I was given a saw which might once have been in a condition for cutting wood, but a glance at it was sufficient to reveal that it must have been a long time ago.

The porter stood at one end of the shed, and surveyed this scene which depicted the futility of the Poor Law methods of dealing with vagrants.

" Come on, now ! " he shouted. " Bend those backs and get some work done."

All my fellow workers showed that they had had much experience of this sort of thing by the way they handled their respective jobs. Slowly, very slowly, the saws moved backwards and forwards, making a growling noise when cutting the wood, and a shrill, grating sound when they struck a nail or a piece of metal. The men seem to get great joy out of trying to cut through a nail. Above the sound of sawing could be heard the slow but emphatic chop, chop of the men in the cells. Between each blow with the chopper was a pause of three to four seconds.

" Get a move on ! " the porter cried, and started to parade up and down the shed.

The speed of the men remained unchanged. I fell in line with the others, for I could see that it mattered little whether I worked fast or slow. I could get very little work done with the tools provided. After a few minutes the porter was called away, and this was the signal for everybody to cease work. The silence which followed was a great relief to me. All was quiet and still ; there was not a word or a motion from anyone for a minute or two.

At last one man straightened himself, stamped his feet and rubbed his hands, and gave a last look in the direction the porter had gone.

" We shan't see him again until he's filled his guts with bacon and eggs," he said, and even while he was thus speaking the smell of a delicious breakfast was wafted into the shed. As if encouraged by the smell of good food, one old man raised his chopper high in the air, and with one tremendous blow drove the blade an inch into the block which was before him.

" Yus, it's true. Ain't it ? " he said, looking around at us all. " The two fattest things in any workhouse are the pigs and the porters."

This remark received general agreement, each emphasizing his approval by throwing a piece of wood away, or kicking the ground or any object which happened to be near.

The old fellow's eyes rested on me. For at least ten seconds he looked hard at me. " I ain't seen yer in these parts before, son, have I ? " he remarked at last.

" No," I replied.

" Pretty tough for a kid like you," he said. " Are yer liable ? "

I had to explain that " Liable " was a new term to me, and that I had no idea what it meant.

" Dear me ! Dear me ! Didn't I see you looking at the ' oil painting ' on the wall of the dining hall ? Didn't you read that if you return to any casual ward in the same county within one month you will be detained four nights, and five if Sunday is included ? Well, that's the meaning of the word

'Liable': liable for detention. Now son, are yer liable?"

"No," I said. "This is the first time I've been in a casual ward."

"First time? Oh, you're lucky. You finish to-day," he returned.

"Finish what?" I asked.

"Finish work. What d'you think I mean?"

This struck me as rather funny, as none of us had done more than five minutes' work and did not seem anxious to do any more. By this time, too, others were drifting into the wood-shed. They had done their work, and we all had a long day before us with nothing to occupy our minds except conversation.

I shall never forget that morning. From about eight-thirty till noon there was nothing to do except rub the saw against a piece of wood every time a porter passed through the shed. When the conversation was not revoltingly disgusting, it centred around such topics as Night Shelters, distances to other casual wards, success in begging, and such like. All the morning I was longing to get near one of the friends I had met at breakfast, so that the terrible monotony might be broken by some clean and intelligent conversation. I was getting very hungry, and tried to console myself with the belief that very soon it would be dinner time, and then I should eat to ease my hunger and also should see my friends again. A clock chimed the hour. "At last!" I thought to myself; 12 o'clock and a change of scene. But to my horror and disgust the clock struck ten! Tears welled into my eyes. Two more hours of this! I could not stand it. I would not! I decided to

get out of this hell as soon as I could. I left the wood-shed and made across the yard for the door through which I had come earlier in the morning. It was locked. I knocked. No one came, so I knocked again. Again and again I knocked, but no one came to see what I wanted. I looked around me. It was a dreary scene. I was surrounded by a high, dirty, gloomy wall. On the top of the wall was a layer of broken glass embedded in cement. Above this were four strands of barbed wire, thus making it impossible to escape by way of climbing the wall.

I looked for a way to get out; but everywhere I was faced with locks, bolts, barbed wire or broken glass. As I returned to the wood-shed I felt beaten and hopeless. When I entered a man called to me with a smile.

"Having a look round, kid? Which is the best side of a spike, inside or out?"

I let him know at once that I preferred the outside, and that if I found a weak spot in its defences I would quickly be there. I sat down by the old man with the chopper and asked him if it was possible to get out of this place.

He looked at me slyly. "Yus, it's possible. Have yer got a bundle?"

I told him that all my belongings were in the office, but that if I could only get out now I'd call for them some other time. At this some of the men within earshot howled with laughter.

"Ha, ha!" one of them shouted. "Jump the wall and then call round for his bundle! Old 'Rubber Gut' would be pleased to meet you again."

"Don't be a fool, son," said the old chap. "It

means a month if you get out of here before your time, and you lose your bundle into the bargain."

I looked around to see if any of my friends had come to the shed while I was away. I did not see any of them, and was just resigning myself to another long wait with nothing to do, when a young lad called me aside from the rest.

" Do you want to get out ? " he asked.

" Yes," I replied. " And the sooner the better."

" Well, if you can get through that ventilator up there you'll be on the roof of this shed, and then you can walk over to the wall and drop into the coal yard. There you'll find a gate which is easy to climb, and on the other side is the street."

I had a feeling of great joy and relief, and decided to make my dash for liberty at once. The first problem was how to get up to the ventilator. I looked all over the shed for something to stand on, in order to reach the top of the shed. I was faced with the task of climbing twelve feet before I could hope for freedom. An idea struck me. Among all this timber in the shed there must be some material of which I could make a ladder, so I searched and found two long pieces of 2 by 1, which, crossed by small pieces of wood for steps, would be ideal. I borrowed a chopper, hunted out some old nails, and started on the job. Some of the others helped, and within ten minutes I was ready for my adventure.

I placed the ladder against the wall, felt that it was firm, and started to climb. In a few seconds my hands were gripping the ventilator.

Everybody in the yard was excited, some of them shouting advice, while I struggled with some wire

which prevented the further opening of the vent. Suddenly all was quiet. Out of the silence came a roar :

" What are you doing up there ? "

I felt the ladder go from under me. I was left hanging from a beam of the roof, my feet dangling without foothold. I heard the voice of the porter below.

" Come down here ! " he yelled.

He was too thickheaded to see that as he had taken away the ladder my only way of getting down was by dropping twelve feet. My arms were stretched almost out of their sockets, and I was feeling sick when, to my great relief, I felt something solid under my feet. One of the men had pushed the porter aside and replaced the ladder. When I felt my feet on something firm once more I breathed deeply and freely. The porter kept yelling to me to come down, but I still wanted to get through the opening if possible. I soon realized that this was out of the question, so I went down the ladder. As I reached the bottom I felt two big hands grab my shoulders, and before I knew what was happening I was whisked off to a cell and locked in.

I was left alone, and had no idea what would happen next. I could hear people moving about, and I shouted, in the hope that one of my friends would hear. I could get no answer, so I sat down to think things over. The cell was a long compartment divided into two, one part being about five feet by six and about ten feet high, while the other was smaller, being only about five feet by four, with a sloping roof.

The smaller part was a dark, gloomy place into which light and air could only come through a grating : an iron plate about two feet square, with rows of holes two inches in diameter. The walls and floor were of stone, and it was very cold. The only entrance was a door which divided it from the larger part. The larger part was a cell just like the one I had slept in the previous night, but without stool or bed board. I closed the middle door to try to keep out the draught coming through the grating. This shut out some of the light also, and I was left to choose between a little more light and also more cold, or a little less cold and practically no light at all. I chose the latter, and jumped about to keep warm.

If I wanted to sit down there was only the floor. I jumped and rested alternately for what seemed to be many hours, keeping fairly warm, but tiring fast. My mind went out to the birds of the air and the beasts of the field, and I decided that I would willingly give up these so-called benefits of civilization in return for the degree of liberty those creatures enjoy.

The nearby clock struck twelve, and very soon afterwards I heard footsteps coming towards me. They stopped outside the door, and I heard a bolt being drawn. It opened a little, a piece of bread and a mug of water was pushed into the cell, then it was closed quickly. But the man opened a small spyhole in the door and peeped at me.

" Do you want any salt and pepper ? " he called out, and I heard someone else sniggering at his remark.

The spyhole closed again, and the footsteps died away. I was thirsty so I drank the water, but the bread was so hard that I could not eat it. Over the whole building came a stillness and quiet like the stillness of midnight. This terrible silence was not broken until the clock struck one, when I heard the sounds of men going out to the wood-shed again. For a few minutes the saws shrieked and the choppers carried on their monotonous chop, chop, chop. After a while calm and silence were restored once more.

At two o'clock the porter came and took me to another room which had a desk in it, and I was told to wait there. Presently in came a very stout man who had a queer uniform on, and looked just like one of the " Poor Law " characters described by Dickens. He struggled into an armchair, and as he sank into the cushions he gave such a sigh that the papers on the desk fluttered as if in a wind. He gripped the sides of the chair and slowly turned his eyes towards me.

" I see by the officer's report that you tried to abscond from here this morning, and that you wilfully destroyed some firewood by making a ladder. Do you know that this is a very serious offence, and that it lies in my power to have you sent to prison ? "

I did not know this, and told him I knew very little about such places and had no desire to know more.

" Have you been in many casual wards ? " he asked. When I told him it was the first he raved like mad.

" First time in a casual ward, and in trouble the first day ! You're heading straight for Dartmoor. What is the explanation ? "

I foolishly started to explain that if one was treated more humanely one would act very differently. This upset him so much that his face turned a greenish purple, and his words came fast and incoherently. I have no idea what he said during his outburst, but all my experience since has convinced me that it was extremely vulgar abuse. When he regained his breath he bawled :

" If you come before me again you go to jail. Get out and stay out ! "

I could not have asked for better instructions. I was only too eager to get out, and I felt sure I would have no difficulty in staying out. But I soon found that I had mistaken the meaning of his words. I thought I was to get out and stay out of the casual ward, but when I went for my property the porter soon convinced me that " Tubby " was only referring to the office.

I expected to be sent out to the wood-shed again. But I was given a piece of soap and told to go to the laundry and do any washing I had to do.

When I arrived I found several men washing their clothes, while others were cleaning their boots or shaving. In the laundry there were a mangle, six large washing tubs with hot and cold water taps, a drying oven heated by steam, and two big coppers filled with boiling water in which was plenty of soda. I intended only to wash my shirt and socks, but fortunately I found my friend " Tom " in the laundry, and he put other ideas into my head.

" You can tell me all about this breaking out business later on," he smiled. " But now you can take off all your clothes and put these overalls on.

We must get rid of that fishy smell from your togs, or you'll have all the dogs in creation running after you."

While I was undressing Tom filled one of the tubs with boiling water. He told me he had finished his washing, so he would give me my first lesson in the art of " Dobying ". He instructed me to put my outer clothes into one tub and my underclothes into another.

" While these are soaking a bit go and clean your boots," said Tom, poking the garments with a big stick. " You'll find brushes and blacking outside the door."

Away I went to clean my boots, conscious of a new feeling of lightheartedness. Whether it was the reaction to my release from the cell or because I had met my friend again, I could not tell. Perhaps it was a bit of both.

When I returned to the wash-tub he was busily scrubbing my shirt. All he asked me to do was to watch him, so that I would know how to do it next time.

" What you should always remember, kid, is to be sure you are clean on this game. Once you let yourself go you'll drift lower and lower, and the time will come when you'll give up trying. And then you'll be done for."

He scrubbed and scrubbed at my clothes until the water was so black that I felt ashamed of myself. At last he put down the scrubbing brush, pulled out the plug and let the water run off.

" You can rinse them while I have a go at the other tub," he said. " And when you've done that

run them through the mangle. The man at the dryer will do the rest."

With a will I set about my task. I rinsed and rinsed until the water was as clear after I took them out as it was before I put them in. Meantime Tom was working miracles with my other clothes, which I thought had been destroyed for ever. He threw my trousers into a tub for me to rinse, but told me not to put them through the mangle until he was ready to help. I was delighted with the result of his washing, and was amazed at the way he used the mangle. All the creases one might have expected were smoothed out, and when the clothes went into the dryer they looked as clean and as smart as if they had been to a professional cleaner's.

" Well, that's that ! " said Tom. " Let's get upstairs now, as it's nearly half-past four, and that's supper time."

Together we went up to the dining hall. When we arrived a porter was clearing everyone out so that the tables could be set for supper. After a few minutes we all filed back and took our seats at the tables. Before each man was a pint of cocoa and eight ounces of bread and margarine.

" That's the end of a perfect day ! " said one old man, banging his bread on the table.

Tom had collected four mugs and four plates, and the man with the ginger hair and the old man who had given me the historical talk came and sat down beside us.

" Tell us all about it, son," said the old chap.

I related the story of my day's experience. They all seemed to enjoy the fact that I had had such an

exciting day, and said how lucky I was to escape being sent to prison. Talk drifted on to the subject of what I was going to do in the morning. I had no real plans in my mind, and I said so. Tom was all for my coming back again and again to the casual wards. He said that if every destitute man and woman went into the wards the government would have to do something about it.

While we were talking a door was opened, and two men carried in a basket. In it were all the clothes which had been washed in the afternoon. The men gathered round and reclaimed their articles. Tom and I took ours, but Ginger and the old man remained seated. When I returned to them I found out that they were both " liable ", and so had to do four days' detention. They would do their washing the day before they went out.

I had a feeling that I would like to keep in touch with these three friends, so I asked if I might know their names.

" The old man is known as ' Spider,' " said Tom, with a smile, " and ' Ginger ' won't mind your calling him that. And my name is Tom."

" Spider " told me a great deal about how to get around London and work the various charities.

" Don't leave London until you've done them all," he said. " I hope one day you'll regard them as I do now, but you must experience them before you can decide."

At five-thirty a porter came and told every man to get to his bed. Children could be heard playing in the streets outside as the men went slowly to their cells. Most of them were grumbling at being sent to bed at

this unearthly hour, but I was thankful, because I had had so little sleep during the past few days. I said good-night to my friends and went to my cell. I almost burst with laughter when I realized that my cell number was thirteen.

I had more time to make my bed, so I took pains over it so as to be sure of a good night's rest. In bed I gave thanks that I had been led to three good comrades, for without their friendship and help the day would have been so miserable that I doubt whether I would have been in that particular cell that night. I heard the clock strike six, and I knew no more until the banging on the door told me it was five in the morning and time to get up again.

CHAPTER FOUR

AFTER eleven solid hours' sleep I was fresh and rested, and only had to be shouted at once before I jumped out of bed to get washed and dressed. With my clean boots and clean clothes I felt quite smart, so I was in high spirits when I went to the dining hall. Tom had seen to it that I did not have any difficulty over my breakfast, and as I was early this morning the tea was hot. During the meal the conversation was light and cheerful, each of my friends doing his best to send me off on another day as lighthearted as possible.

At six o'clock the porter came and called the names of the men for discharge. As Tom and I were among them we said good-bye to " Ginger " and " Spider ", and filed out of the office. After we had reclaimed our property we were each given either a ticket for eight ounces of bread and two ounces of cheese to be obtained from another casual ward, or the bread and cheese itself. Tom was given the bread and cheese and I the ticket. He explained to me that those who say they are leaving London on discharge are given the bread, while those who are staying in London get a ticket. It is a scheme by which men are either forced out of London or get no dinner, for the trouble of getting the ticket exchanged for food drives men to soup kitchens and charities.

Tom walked with me as far as Whitehall, but left me there as he had to go to Luton on Fellowship work. He promised to look for me when he came back, and hoped I would not get myself into any more trouble. As he turned off Big Ben struck half-past six, so I made for Covent Garden Market, hoping to get a job helping to unload vegetables from the lorries. There isn't much to be earned in this market, but many drivers will give a feed in return for help on their vans. Many will also give a lift to anyone who helps them, and by this means I have been carried as far out as Bedford. That morning I had two jobs, and earned one and sixpence and a good breakfast. I decided to pay for my bed that night, and to spend the afternoon at " Rambling Katie's ". Tom had told me where it was, and that I should have to be there by 3.30 p.m. I went from one " kip " to another searching for a bed, but nowhere would they take my money before 8 o'clock at night.

Tired out, I made my way to St. James's Park and rested on a seat until it was time to go to " Rambling Katie's ".

As I came through Birdcage Walk I noticed several of the men who had been in the casual ward with me the previous night. Each of them was walking in the direction of Parliament Square, so I began to wonder if they were making for the same place as myself.

The old man had given me much valuable advice, the most important of all being to keep myself to myself until I had had more experience. Bearing this in mind, I did not speak to any of them, and I

was not surprised that no one spoke to me. At the end of Birdcage Walk I turned right, went past Westminster Central Hall, and crossed Victoria Street into Great Smith Street. I glanced up at Big Ben as I crossed, and saw that the time was just after three-thirty. I had timed my arrival well, and if my instructions were correct I would be able to go right in without waiting.

As I turned the corner of Wood Street I saw three of the men I had passed in Birdcage Walk standing in the doorway of the house I was looking for. I smiled to myself, for I remembered Tom's remark about the necessity to learn a lot of short cuts about London, or I would be at the tail end of every queue I lined up in. I reached the door just as it was opened by a very charming lady of about thirty-five years of age.

" Good-afternoon, lady," chimed the three in chorus, raising their hats in a manner that suggested much experience. " Glad to be here, for we're very tired."

" Come right in," said the lady. She showed us to the hat rack, where we left our hats and coats. " Have you come far to-day ? "

" We three have come from Reading to-day, miss," said one of them, giving me a look as much as to say : " Where have you come from ? You liar ! "

" And where did you stay last night ? " the lady asked me.

" In a casual ward, miss," I said.

" Oh yes. Have you been here before ? " she added.

" No," I said, " but I have been directed here by a friend."

" Well, come in here, all of you, and have some tea," she said, leading us into a very comfortable room. Perhaps ten tables were set out with four cups on each, and we four all sat down at one. There was only one table left unoccupied now, and tea was being served. It was brought round by another lady, while the one who let us in picked up a plate of scones. Each man had one scone. Behind these two ladies followed another very much older, who was in charge of the sugar bowl. She had something to say to each man as she came to him, but I could not hear what she said until she reached our table. She served me first.

" How many lumps ? " she asked.

" Three, please," I promptly replied.

" Three ! Good gracious ! I really think two of these would be ample. But try one." So saying, she dropped one lump of sugar in my tea. The next victim asked for two and got one ; the next asked for one and only got one ; the last did not take sugar, and so earned the dear old lady's praise.

I have since learnt that in the whole history of this rest-house nobody has ever had more than one lump of sugar. One good thing must be recorded, however ; in spite of the sugar shortage the tea provided by these ladies is the best cup of tea given by any of this kind of place.

When all had finished their scone and tea the tables were cleared and games brought out. Draughts, dominoes, Ludo and puzzles of many kinds were offered for our entertainment. For an

hour we played games, then we were asked to bring our chairs to the end of the room and form a half circle. Having settled ourselves, one of the ladies read from a paper she had in her hand. She told us about her " League " of tramps who had promised to kneel down and say the Lord's Prayer each day until the following October. If a tramp gave this promise he was supplied with a neat little cross with the words " League of Our Father " inscribed on it. The only qualification for membership of the League was the ability to say the Lord's Prayer before all those assembled. It was surprising to see how many boys (two of whom, by the way, had boasted during the games what good choir boys they had been) failed to pass this simple test for membership.

There were few rules to be observed at this rest-house, though one is very strict. It reads : " No money may be given or lent." This, of course, puts a brake on those lads who could get a job to-morrow if only they had a shilling or two to tide them over the night.

That day, however, the regulars were surprised to hear the old lady say :

" Now I want to ask, how many of you, dear friends, slept out last night ? "

Hope sprang in the hearts of many, for at least ninety per cent. put up their hands to signify that they had not been to bed last night.

" Now how many of you have been out two nights ? "

The response fell to only about fifty per cent.

" Dear, dear ! You brave boys. But how many have slept out for the past week ? "

By now the "brave boys" were smelling a rat, for only six declared that they had been out that long.

"Give them a clap," she said. "What courage the dear boys must have." And accordingly the six received the applause of the rest.

"How many have been out two weeks ?" was the next question.

All but two had now given up hope of a bed ticket or the money to pay for one. These two were determined to fight it out. One retired at three weeks, and the other, who to my knowledge had slept in the casual ward for the last two nights, solemnly declared that it was twenty-eight days since he had been to bed. The old lady gave him a sweet smile and said :

"I shall give you this book, as you are most able to appreciate it."

I saw the book afterwards. It was the Bible story of "Our Lord's forty days and forty nights in the Wilderness".

At the end of the talk we were all invited to come again, and each received a special invitation to come on Christmas Day.

I still had to find somewhere to sleep, so I made my way to a lodging house close to the Elephant and Castle, which I had heard was one of the best in that district. When I arrived the "deputy" was in charge, and he told me there were no beds left. I was about to go when I saw two men come in and ask for a bed. They were at once accommodated. This seemed strange to me, but I learned afterwards that it was the custom to "tip" a copper or two in order to get first choice of a bed.

Next I went to one near London Bridge. Here I had a choice of beds from fivepence to ninepence. As I was not very flush I took the cheapest. For another twopence I had a bowl of tea and a thick slice of bread and margarine. Having become a "lodger", I qualified for admission to the kitchen. This was in the basement, and could only be reached down a narrow flight of steps. At the top of these steps stood a "deputy", whose job it was to see that no one who had not paid for his bed gained entry to the kitchen. At the bottom I found a large room with a coke-grid fire at each end. There were several long tables and forms in the room, and along the walls were rows of "lockers". My first impression on entering was that a heavy fog was coming on, but I soon found that it was only the result of men smoking "Hard-up" and "Twist" in a place where there was little ventilation.

I made my way to a table and sat down to drink my tea. At one end of the table was a "Rummy School", with boys and men gambling furiously with half-pennies.

Card-playing and fighting appear to be the only pastimes that ever create any excitement in a lodging house kitchen, otherwise it would be hard to find a more dull and monotonous place. Card-playing seemed to be general every day, but most of the fighting takes place at the week-ends. There is no question of "Queensbury Rules" in a kitchen scrap. Fists are used only so long as they are found to be useful, and more often than not weapons of wood and iron are brought into play.

During my first night in this place I saw a man

crash in another man's skull with a lemonade bottle. They had an argument over some money in the "card school", and soon came to blows. The atmosphere grew electric, and I would have been glad to be out of it.

At periods of half an hour the "deputy" would blow a whistle and shout: "Any more going up?" For some time I did not get the meaning of this, and it was only when I noticed that at each shout some men got up and went out that I guessed it was the call to bed. The gate leading to the bedrooms was opened only every half-hour, and there was no going to bed in betweenwhiles.

One Sunday the deputy in this lodging house was the centre of a funny incident. Each Sunday evening a band of evangelists came to hold a service in the kitchen. They were usually away by 7.30 p.m., but that night they stayed a few minutes later. The deputy wanted to get his gate opened and shut so that he could go and have a drink, but he could hardly blow his whistle while the closing prayer was being said. So he stood with whistle in his mouth waiting for the final word. As the preacher ended with the blessing: "And God bless you and may we all meet in Heaven," the whistle blew and the deputy yelled:

"Any more going up?"

I only stayed one night here. For the next few days I roamed about London, picking up food where I could and sleeping on the Embankment or on the Mall. One Saturday night I was on the Embankment when I received a "Sunday Breakfast Ticket". This entitled me to a meal in the morning, and also

a hot-water wash. As the man who gave me the ticket moved away he was followed by a crowd of destitute, who were hoping to receive tickets. I took the other direction and made my way towards Waterloo Bridge. I passed a boy sitting upon a seat. He called me to him.

"Did you get a ticket, mate?" he asked.

"Yes," I replied, and sat down beside him.

"Do you know where to go?" he asked.

"No," I told him. He promised to show me later on.

We did not talk much then because I fell off to sleep. But when I awoke he offered to "Show me the ropes".

I was very glad of the opportunity of having someone to show me around a bit, so I gladly agreed to the suggestion. He and I set off for Blackfriars. I found him to be quite good-natured and even lighthearted. He seemed to see the funny side of any situation.

"New to this game, mate?" he asked me.

"Yes," I said, "I am. Quite new and innocent."

"Oh well, you'll be all right later on. It's the first seven years that are the worst. After that it becomes second nature."

I was glad I had fallen in with a cheerful chap like him, because his company brightened up the dreary life a little. He instructed me how to conduct myself when I arrived at the shelter.

"Have you ever been saved?" he asked.

"Saved," I said. "Saved from what?"

"Saved! You know. You go on your knees and say you're sorry for all the bad things you've done."

I had not had much experience, and wondered what exactly this game was ; but I promised my friend I would do all he told me to do if it was for our good.

" That's it, kid. You follow me and we shall sleep in a bed to-night." That sounded good, so I made a silent vow that whatever I was asked to do that day I would do with a will.

We arrived at the shelter just after 7 a.m., and my guide led me straight through a large open door and along a passage. At the end of this passage were some stone steps leading down to the wash-houses and dining rooms. At the top of the steps stood a man who demanded to see either a breakfast ticket or a bed money receipt for the previous night. We who had tickets passed through, but others were turned back to wait for the possibility of a ticket-holder not turning up.

At the bottom of the steps was a large wash-house fitted up with rows of washing basins with hot and cold water taps. There were towels hanging on rollers, but my guide advised me not to use them. I thought it was about time I knew his name, so that our relations could become more friendly, so I asked him what I could call him.

" I'm known as ' Tiger ', so you can call me that." As he spoke he was rolling up his shirt sleeves.

" Got any soap ? " he asked.

I had none, but he produced a large lump from his pocket.

" Can't get on without soap," he said, " and the ' Army ' don't supply any, so we have to rob the spikes."

I felt fine after my good wash, but suddenly I was faced with the problem of how to dry my face if I was not to use the towels provided. " Tiger " saw my need at once and came to the rescue.

" No towel either ? " he teased me. " Well, well ! I shall have to show you another trick." From his waist he unfolded a very clean towel. " Serves as a body-belt as well, as you see, and it keeps me warm at night."

I was amazed that he could stow away so many necessary articles on his person without revealing a bulge or awkward packing anywhere.

" You must always carry your own towel or you'll find you can't dry yourself at all," he remarked. He surveyed the towels hanging on the walls. " Count them towels and count the numbers who use them, and then you'll know the reason they're so wet and dirty. The sanitary inspectors are supposed to come round and inspect these places. I've never seen anyone except an ' Army ' man come round, and that's always been when the clean towels have just been put up."

We both dried ourselves and put on our coats. It was nearly half-past seven, and we had more than an hour to wait for breakfast. " Tiger " led me into the large dining hall, which was already filling up with men of all descriptions.

" This place is known as ' The Jungle,' " he said. " There's everything in here bar elephants and giraffes. Those two animals can't get through the door."

Judging from the men's condition and conduct,

it was not surprising that the place had earned its reputation. " Tiger " had two pennies, so he bought two cups of tea, and we made our way to a table in search of a seat. Most of the seats were occupied by someone, but many were merely tilted forward to indicate that they were reserved. Being new to the conditions, I would have accepted this as I found it. But not so my friend " Tiger ". He could not find two vacant and unreserved chairs together, so he walked up to two which were tilted towards the table. As we were about to sit down a man on the opposite side of the table growled :

" They're booked."

" Tiger " merely smiled and said : " Not only booked, but taken." He sat down. I did likewise. The man across the table seemed quite annoyed by our action.

" Didn't I tell you those chairs are booked ? " he bawled.

" Yes," said " Tiger " pleasantly, " you did say something about that, but you didn't say who by." Turning to me, he said : " Perhaps his pal isn't up yet, so we'll sit tight for a while."

We drank our tea and rested. Nobody had come to claim the chairs, and I wondered how " Tiger " would deal with the situation if anyone did. Looking around at the other tables I was amazed at the disgusting conditions. One man at the next table was wearing two overcoats, several underjackets and other garments. He smelt vile. Obviously he had had neither a bath nor a wash for many days. He spent most of the time scratching himself and picking vermin off his body. I felt sick, and must

have revealed my feelings, for " Tiger " tapped me on the shoulder and said :

" That's how you'll get if you get used to charity and begging. There's no need for it, because if he doesn't want to go into the casual ward there are cleansing stations where he could get fumigated without charge."

In spite of the revolting sight, I was drawn to have another look at the man. I could see vermin crawling all over him, and I readily appreciated what my new pal had told me about looking at any chairs or tables before sitting down. We shifted to another table where there were two empty chairs. " Tiger " said nothing, but I clearly realized what he wanted me to see.

The next table to us was occupied by two men only ; the other four chairs had hats, coats or parcels on them to indicate that they were engaged. These two men were known as the " Hard-up Kings ". They earned the name because they collected cigarette ends in the streets, brought them here, unpicked them, rolled cigarettes out of the filth, and sold them at ten a penny.

" Tiger " looked at me and said :

" If you or I were caught peddling anything without a licence we'd get a month in prison ; but those chaps can sell that filthy stuff and get away with it. If you went to the ' Borough ' to get some ' tarry blockos ' to sell you'd be told that, in the interests of health, that method of earning a living is prohibited. Yet think of the sickness and germs which are spread through these men picking up fag-ends and selling them to the destitute. If you

complain to the ' Army ' you'll be told that as you don't sleep here you have no grounds for complaint. So the best advice I can offer you is to help us change the conditions in the casual wards, and so do away with these filthy dumps."

It was half-past eight, and the orderlies were calling for all men to leave the hall. There was much shouting and blowing of whistles, and the language was such as one does not expect in a religious institution. Slowly the men filed out. But those with breakfast tickets lined up again at the doorway. We now had to wait until the staff had swept the floor and arranged the tables for breakfast. After ten minutes the doors were re-opened, our tickets taken from us, and we passed into the hall once more.

At the end of the hall near the bar were ten tables, each set for six men. About eight of these were filled up at once. At the doors were many others who had no tickets, but were taking their chance of being picked to fill the vacant places left by the failure of ticket-holders to arrive. After a minute or two a group of men came in, and all the tables were then filled. An officer called for silence, and gave his welcome in these words :

" Well, men, you're here for breakfast, and after that there will be a service. All of you who stay are expected to attend that service. So any of you who are likely to feel ill, have appointments to keep, or for any other reason wish to leave before the service, are invited to do so now, before breakfast is served."

No one took his leave, so " grace " was sung and

plates brought. Each man received some bread, two sausages, a little fried tomato, a rock cake and tea.

While we were eating the doors of the hall were locked and chairs were placed in rows at the other end of the room. Topics of conversation were almost entirely limited to the questions : how many were saved last week, and which hostel were the saved being sent to. To my embarrassment a man at our table asked me bluntly :

" Are you going to be saved, mate ? "

I had no answer ready. I had a vague idea that to be saved or not was a matter for the individual conscience ; but here salvation seemed to be the recognized passport to food and shelter. While I was trying to think of a reply " Tiger " spoke for me.

" Of course he's going to be saved," he said. " The damn fool has been spending nights out on the Embankment and going without food as well."

I felt angry with him, but I had a feeling that he was doing his best for me. I could not let him down, so I let it be assumed that when the time came I would be ready to do whatever I was advised.

One man, who seemed to be an authority on this subject, said : " Well, don't be in the first six, because the ' Major ' grabs them for scrubbing."

I did not take any active part in the ensuing talk, but I gathered that " Tiger " had extracted a promise from the other four that they would keep an eye on me, and if I needed any advice they would give it.

By now breakfast was almost over, and the men were drifting one by one to the other end of the room.

" Well," said " Tiger ", " we've had our breakfast, so let's go and pay for it. Don't forget, sing loud and don't get cold feet, because if you do your feet will remain cold all night."

By this time I had completely accepted his logical philosophy, and my mind was working on the question of food, clothing and shelter and how to get them. As we took our seats a very smart, sanctimonious young man sat down at the portable organ. His body swayed, he screwed up his face as if in pain, and the organ growled and moaned.

" He used to play better than that in prison," said " Tiger ". " But I suppose the drink's getting him down now."

The platform was filled with men and women wearing uniforms. The service began. It was orthodox enough in the main ; hymns, prayers and Bible reading passed off well, and everything was going with a swing. But while the address was being delivered things began to happen. From the front row came the strongest and loudest snore I have ever heard in my life. The preacher stopped and looked in the sleeper's direction.

" Wake him up," he said. Promptly one of the orderlies dropped a book to make a noise. Not only did the snorer wake up, but several others who were sleeping a little more quietly woke too. Evidently they had completely forgotten they were at a service, for in the vilest of lodging house vocabulary they wanted to know who it was making a row, and advised them in their own interests to remain quieter.

A great deal of noise was made by the scraping of chairs, for it appeared that quite a number had been

awakened by this interruption, and were stretching themselves without being fully conscious of where they were. I was not sorry for the talker, for he looked a hypocrite anyway. But the young girls who had come to sing to us had my sympathy. These young people should never have been brought to such places as " The Jungle ", for they would see enough of the seamy side of life without having it forced under their noses.

The talk went on, and by the time it was finished (it took just one hour and ten minutes) nearly everybody was fast asleep. The men were awakened by the organ grinding out the tune for the next hymn. They stretched themselves and groped for their hymn-books. By the time most of them had found the place the hymn was finished and a selection of choruses had been started. This was the most successful part of the service, for most of them knew the words, and put life into their singing. They were just getting lively, when the singing was stopped and an old man stepped forward to give his testimony and to tell us why we all ought to be saved at once.

His testimony went along the usual lines : drink, gambling, women, idleness, etc. But his final appeal was new to me :

" Don't come in for what you can get in the way of food and bed, but come in complete surrender ! "

That sentence satisfied me. I saw through it all. No more would I hesitate to get all I could. The whole affair was a farce, so there could be no question of sacrilege. We were all on our knees now. The appeal for converts went on. First the male officers came among the seats, trying to get men to go to

the penitential form in front. Only two went up before a second round of choruses was started. Again the appeal was made. The male officers gave it up, and the young women took their places. From time to time I took a peep at the penitential form. I was not to go until six others were already there. I looked up again. But I could not see the form, for a young girl, not more than twenty years of age, was standing in front of me. She came to my chair, put her arm round my neck, and asked if I would go to the form. The gentle touch of her arm almost made me ignore my friend's advice.

" Not yet," I said. Then I blushed as I realized that I had put my foot in it.

" Come now," said the girl. " I will lead you." She took hold of my hand to lead me to the front.

I hurriedly glanced at the form ; only four men were kneeling there. The monotonous appeal was still coming from the platform. Oh, how I wished that two more would get up and go to the front. The girl still had hold of my hand, and was pleading with me to go to the penitential form. I heard a chair move ; another man was going up. Only one more, and then I could go ! A man in front of me went next. I was just taking breath and mustering courage to get up when I felt a dig in my ribs. This was the O.K. signal. I slowly rose and allowed the girl to lead me to a place at the form. Several more accompanied me, and I realized that they had all been waiting for the first six mugs to go. Soon the form was filled. Immediately the last place was occupied the appeal stopped and the meeting was

brought to a hurried close. I was disgusted. Enough flies in the web, so the farce needn't go on any longer ! While the rest were leaving, all at the form remained in an attitude of prayer.

Suddenly I heard a whisper in my ear :

" What are you here for, son ? "

" Food and bed," I innocently replied. " What d'you expect ? "

I looked up, and was horrified to see that I had not been addressed by a destitute, but by an officer of the hostel. He only smiled at me and whispered :

" Yes, I know. But have the sense to have a different story ready when you go into the office."

When all the others had left we were allowed to sit down while waiting to be interviewed one at a time in the office. I looked round for " Tiger ", and saw him beckoning for me to go to him.

" You did well," he said. " Were you picked for anything ? "

I told him that I had only been asked why I was there. And I confessed to the answer I had given.

" He's all right," " Tiger " smiled. " He knows the game. Now listen : this is your story for the governor when you get into the office." He proceeded to give me detailed instructions how I was to conduct myself during the interview. I was to change my identity completely. A different name, occupation, birthplace, and so on were necessary. As I was the seventh man to go to the form and the first six were taken for scrubbing, I was the first to be interviewed.

It was very similar to the interview I had had at the night office on the Embankment. The governor

wanted all my life history. He got what I had been told to tell him. After forms had been filled up I was asked if I wanted work.

" Yes," I replied.

" Very well, then," said the officer. " You can go to our Hostel and they'll find you some."

I was delighted. When I went out I looked for " Tiger " and told him about it.

" Don't get too excited, kid," he remarked. " You don't know what it is yet, but I do. Anyway, we shall go and test it out."

His turn came and he went in. When all of us had been interviewed we were given a cup of tea and a piece of cake, and told we would get supper at the hostel. A man was appointed to show us the way. Although it was said that he was given our tram fares, we all walked. " Tiger " walked with me and pointed out the places of interest and spots I ought to remember as landmarks. We passed the Elephant and Castle, went along New Kent Road, passed the "Morning Post Home", to the Old Kent Road. As we went by the Home " Tiger " told me to remind him later and he would put me wise to that place.

Eventually we came to the hostel. As we approached it I got quite excited. I was curious to know what my job would be, what I would get for supper, and when I could go to bed. I was not feeling sleepy, but was very tired. Our guide went up to the gate and rang the bell. An old man opened it and saluted us with the cry :

" All this lot from ' The Jungle ' ? "

The gate closed behind us, and we were escorted

to a small wooden office in the yard. A man put his head out of the window and said :

" You'll all see the Major in the morning. Tea at five, service at six-thirty, supper at a quarter to nine. Carry on."

Bang went the window as it closed again. There was an hour to tea time, so " Tiger " took me into a large room where there were many men sitting about, some reading, some writing, others talking in groups. We chose a seat in a quiet corner and settled down to an hour's rest. I asked him if I could go to bed any time I liked. " Not before the service," he replied, " as attendance is compulsory." But I was relieved to find that I would not need to be saved again for a day or two at least.

A bell rang. Everybody at once rose and went into the dining hall. Here we were each given two slices of bread and margarine and a mug of tea. At the side of each plate was a teaspoonful of jam. It did not take us long to get rid of our tea, and in a few minutes all plates were empty. At once all eyes were turned towards a small door in one corner. " Tiger " told me to watch it, and to rush when the crowd rushed. Suddenly the door opened, and an orderly came out with an extra urn of tea. There was one wild rush of men with their mugs. The orderly put down the urn and ran for his life. If he had not been quick the tea would have been spilt over him.

I rushed for the urn with the others, but I found myself at the back of a struggling crowd. I missed " Tiger ", and could not tell where he was until I saw his arm shoot out from the middle of the crowd

and grab my mug. After a few moments he emerged with two mugs full of tea.

" You must be quicker, or else you'll starve among a crowd like this," he said. I could only compliment him on his speed, and promise to develop a similar speed at the first possible moment.

Tea over, we had nothing to do until the service began. The evening service was bright and cheerful, and I saw a new side to my pal. He sang all the old favourite hymns with an enthusiasm which I envied. Afterwards he told me he was always happy when he could let himself go in hymns which he had learned at his mother's knee.

"It makes you forget spikes, lice and hunger for a while," he remarked, " and it makes me feel friendly with people I'd like to kick at any other time."

After service an orderly called our names and gave us the number of our beds. " Tiger " and I were to sleep next to each other, so I had no more anxious moments that day.

Supper was soon over. It consisted of one slice of bread and margarine. Most of the men picked it up and ate it on the way to bed. The dormitories were large rooms with lines of small beds in them. Each bed was numbered. They were long enough, but were very narrow, hardly more than two feet wide, and were very uncomfortable. Talking was prohibited after 10 p.m., lights were put out, and everybody settled down to spend the night as best he could. I was very tired, so I slept better than I would have done.

We were called at 6 a.m., and we got up, washed and dressed, then went down to breakfast. The

meal consisted of a mug of tea, two slices of bread and margarine and a thin slice of breakfast sausage. Breakfast over, all except the previous night's arrivals went to work. Those of us who had come from " The Jungle " had to go through the farce of passing the doctor. Whether he was a qualified man I cannot say, but in a little over five minutes he passed some twenty men as fit for work, which does not say much for the medical examination. Then we were taken before the Major, who read over to us the rules and regulations of the hostel, and told us what work we would have to do. " Tiger " and I were allotted the task of sorting paper. It was a dirty job. Sacks of dirty and dusty paper were brought from the various warehouses and factories of the city, and we had to sort it into various grades.

The air in the room was full of dust. The men who had been there a week or two looked so pale that I was sure they had consumption. I was told that I would get a shilling a week and my keep while I was learning, and that later on it would be possible to earn as much as five shillings a week. I hated the job from the start, but I thought it was my duty to give it a fair trial. I was given a sack filled with cardboard boxes, brown paper, newspaper, string, and all sorts of odds and ends. I had to sort this lot according to colour and quality.

The foreman was a very grumpy old man ; he told me he was convinced I would never make a good sorter. At one shilling a week I had no great ambition to become one, and I felt like telling him so. But I refrained from doing anything rash until I had discussed it with " Tiger ". I settled down to my

job, and began to take an interest in various aspects of the task. First, I read the labels, bills, etc., to find out where the sack had come from. Then I tried to imagine what sort of goods had been wrapped up in these papers and boxes. While I was musing along these lines I picked up a small sealed packet. I took a good look at it. There was no name on it, nor any mark to show what was inside. I had a feeling that caution was desirable, but curiosity was urging me to open it. " Tiger " was a little way off, so I beckoned to him, showed him the package, and asked if it would be all right to undo it.

" Not here, mate," he said. " Let's go down to the lavatory, and then we'll soon see what it is."

We went down. When we were alone I broke open the package. To my astonishment I found a lady's wrist watch inside. It was obviously valuable, so I thought of taking it to the office.

" Don't be silly," said " Tiger ". " We must hide it and get out as quickly as we can."

I did not object to the suggestion to get out quickly, but I did think twice about this apparent theft.

" Let's go and finish the sack and see if anything else is in it," he said as we returned to our work. When I got back to my place the foreman was waiting for me.

" Where've you been all this time ? " he yelled. " You've been away ten minutes. This won't do ; you'll have to see the boss this afternoon."

I felt like telling him I would go at once, but I was not sure whether " Tiger " had been able to hide the watch. I made a minute search of the rest of

the sack, but found nothing more of value. Before going to get another sack I went to my pal to see if he had any plans.

" We'll leave this hostel after dinner," he said. " And if I know anything of the value of watches we shall sleep in a bed to-night."

Dinner time came, and we all went down to the wash-house, then to the dining hall. The dinner was cottage pie and potatoes. The portion was little enough for an ordinary man, but after a morning in the dirt and dust of the paper rooms it was more than enough. Work ceased for one hour at dinner time, so after we left the dining hall we had forty minutes left. " Tiger " had all plans made. He told me not to worry about anything, but to get outside at the earliest possible moment. I trusted him, and asked no questions. At the gate we were stopped.

" No one allowed out without permission," said the gate-keeper.

We looked about us. There was no other way out, so, telling me to follow him, " Tiger " pushed past the man and tried to open the gate. It was locked. The gate-keeper started to remonstrate with us, and made such a noise that he attracted the Major's attention.

" What's all this row here ? " he asked.

" These two are trying to break out," the gate-keeper explained. " Tiger " chimed in with :

" We're so dry that we must have a drink before we start work. And when I say a drink I mean good old four ale."

The Major looked aghast. " You drink ? " he exclaimed. " Then get out of here at once ! "

Turning to the old gate-keeper, he said : " Let these men out and see they don't come here again."

Outside, my pal smiled at me and said :

" Not bad for a teetotaller, is it ? I knew he wouldn't have a drunkard around, so I played that card."

He had already put the watch over the wall, by tying a long piece of string to the package and lowering it from a window.

" Lucky no one saw it," he said, " or we'd have lost it. I had to do that in case we were searched before we came out." He cut the string, and, the watch safe in our possession, we moved off westward. We had not yet decided how to dispose of it. Trying to pawn a valuable article would arouse suspicion, and if we sold it to a dealer we would not get anything like a fair price. Then " Tiger " had a brain wave.

" If we only knew who this belonged to we might get more by returning it," he remarked.

He took out the watch and examined it for some mark of identification. It was clearly a presentation watch, for it had a name but no address on it. He looked inside the box and found a lady's name and address on a card. It was a West End address, so we decided to take it along. We had a long walk to the West End, but we were confident that a little reward would be forthcoming to make it worth while. It was just three o'clock when we arrived at a very large house. I looked for the back entrance, but " Tiger " laughed and said :

" Front door for us, mate. We're benefactors, not beggars."

He went up the steps and rang the bell. A maid came to the door. He asked for the lady, using the name on the card. She gave us a contemptuous look.

" Madam is not in to-day," she said, and gently but firmly closed the door.

My heart sank. Were we to have a valuable watch in our possession and not be able to make a penny on it ? I felt quite hopeless about it, and was going to say so to " Tiger ", when he stepped into the gutter and, cap in hand, began to chant one of the hymns he had sung so well the previous day. I stood rooted to the ground, staring in amazement. As he sang he moved slowly along the street. He had gone about fifty yards when a maid came out of a house, gave him some coins and quickly went back. He stopped singing at once and came back to me.

" All right ! " he said. " Fourpence ! That's enough to get a telephone call through."

Just as I was beginning to wonder whether he was mad he told me of his idea.

" We've got to get past that maid somehow," he explained. " So I shall put through a telephone call and tell the lady we've got the watch."

We went to a call box and searched for the number. It was a thrilling moment when he got through and started speaking. He spoke very clearly and nicely. After a few sentences his face brightened up.

" Very well, lady. We shall be round in about five minutes." He hung up the receiver. " Come on, mate, I want to see that maid's face when we call again."

We went round feeling as lighthearted as two children at a picnic. Without hesitation he went up the steps and pressed the bell. I think he kept his finger on the button a little longer than necessary, and his face wore a look of importance. The maid was surprised when she saw us again.

" The lady wants to see us. Very important," said " Tiger ". She shut the door, saying she would make enquiries. A minute or two later she opened the door again. Thoroughly on her dignity, she asked us to come in. We stepped into a well-furnished hall, with a large mirrored hat-stand on one side. She took our caps and hung them on a peg. My pal was enjoying himself.

" Put your gloves down here," he said to me, pointing to a small table near the stand. He deliberately preened himself before the mirror, much to the embarrassment of the girl, who was waiting to take us to the lady.

" This way, sirs," she said, and led us to a room in which a huge fire was burning brightly. A lady came to meet us.

" Now tell me all about it please," she said. " Tiger " went through the story of how we found the watch, and embellished it by indicating that we were so honest that our only thought had been to return it to the owner at once.

" Let me see it, please," the lady said. He handed her the treasure. She took it gently and looked it all over.

" Oh, I am so glad to have this back. You are the two most honest boys I have ever met. How did you come to be at the hostel ? "

" We both got saved yesterday, madam, and we were sent there to work for our living," he answered.

" You must tell me all about it," she said. " Are you hungry ? "

" Tiger " spoke up quickly. " Yes, lady. We've had very little to eat to-day."

" Very well, then, I shall order you a cup of tea now, and you shall have a meal as soon as it can be prepared." She pressed a bell, and a maid entered. Instructions were given, the maid departed, and the lady asked us to draw a settee nearer to the fire. We sat down.

The warm fire and prospects of a good feed, the comfortable settee and pleasant surroundings soon reduced me to a condition of complete contentment. I had no desire to talk, or even to listen to " Tiger " and the lady. I only wanted to sit still and enjoy the unexpected comfort. I could not help comparing this warmth with the cold of the London night air, this comfortable settee with the hard seats of the Embankment, the clean and pleasant surroundings with the dull and drab prison-like atmosphere of a casual ward.

The maid returned in a few minutes, pushing a small trolley. On it were tea-cups and saucers, plates, a teapot, and large plates of bread and butter and cakes. The lady served the tea, so, after giving us one more contemptuous look, the maid retired. When he saw the cakes " Tiger " gave me a sly dig in the ribs and an appreciative wink.

" After tea," said the lady, " I would like to have a talk with you both. Perhaps you will be able to tell me many things I have long been wanting to

know. But first tell me where you expect to sleep to-night."

He explained that that problem does not generally arise until the evening. There were several places at which we could try our luck, but it was impossible to say exactly where we would get in.

" Oh dear ! Please excuse me ! For the moment I forgot you are penniless. Tell me, how much do you have to pay for a bed at one of those hostels ? A comfortable one, I mean."

He explained that a bed could be obtained for eightpence, but it would be one of about a hundred and fifty in one room. But for a shilling a cubicle could be had at any Rowton House, or for one and a penny you could get a cubicle at the London County Council's lodging house, " Bruce House ".

" Very well," said the lady, " I shall telephone and secure a bed each for you. Here is the telephone book. Will you find me the number ? Can you get in at any time ? "

He explained that once a bed was booked there was no time limit for going in or out, but to be sure of a bed one should book by eight o'clock. He found the number for the King's Cross Rowton House, and the lady went away to telephone. When we were alone " Tiger " said it would perhaps be better not to mention the watch again, but to trust the lady to do what she would.

" If she wants to talk about the Charity Dumps I shall be very pleased to oblige with a mouthful," he added. " I wonder if she gives money to those places ? "

At that moment the lady returned.

" I have arranged for you to sleep at that place to-night," she said, " so as we shall have no worry now I hope we can have a really long talk."

For fully two hours we stayed at this house, talking and eating. When at last we did go we were the richer by ten shillings each and a letter to the headquarters of one of the charity organizations.

We stayed at the Rowton House that night. We each had a small cubicle, over the top of which was stretched wire netting. It reminded me of a chicken shed, but perhaps it was as well to have some protection from those who " prowl at night ", even in a lodging house.

Nothing exciting happens in the Rowton Houses. Most of those who stay there are old men waiting passively for the end. I have heard these places referred to as " Abodes of Lost Souls ", and I think it describes them well. One point in their favour, however, is that a good and cheap meal can be bought there.

We had a good breakfast, and by nine o'clock were ready for the day's adventures. To my surprise " Tiger " told me he was not going to use the letter, and advised me not to. He assured me that I would find it worse than the hostel, but if I still wanted to go he would show me the way. When I got to the headquarters he stayed outside while I went in. I handed my letter to a man at a counter, and he took it to another who was sitting at a table.

" Let him wait a bit," said the second. " I'm busy now."

For nearly an hour I waited on a form in a small waiting room. At last I was called, was put through

a similar examination to the one at the Night Office, and at the end was given a note to take to the " Officer in Charge " of a Work Aid Home. " Tiger " had waited for me. But he would not go in, so we parted, promising to meet again soon.

It was eleven o'clock when I arrived at the " Home ". At the gate I was received by a man in uniform, who took my name, then handed me a piece of paper.

" Take this to the foreman down the yard," he said. " He'll tell you what you've got to do."

Going down I met one or two men all dirty and dusty.

" Are you stopping in, mate ? " asked one.

I told him I intended to give the place a trial, and asked where I ought to take the paper.

" You'll find the foreman down there," he said, pointing to some steps.

I went down into a large, dark and gloomy basement. The air was filled with dust from the sawing and chopping of wood. As I entered a man tapped at the window of a little wooden office. I went in and handed him the paper.

" Can you bundle ? " he asked me.

" I've never done any before, but I'll do my best," I told him. But he shook his head.

" Better start with the saw," he said. He took me to a sawing horse, showed me where to get the wood, and how long it was to be cut.

" Take it steady to-day, because you don't come to pay until to-morrow," he said.

I did not understand what he meant, but I got on with the job, determined to find out later just

where and how I stood. I took my jacket off, rolled up my sleeves, and set to work. The dust got into my eyes, my mouth, and my ears. I grew hot and began to sweat. My arms soon tired and my back ached. I straightened up to have a rest and look around. I could see and hear other men near me, but the air was so thick with dust that I could not distinguish anyone.

Suddenly the noise died away. I looked up to see vague forms making for the door. A voice yelled at me :

" Hey, you ! Come on. Dinner."

I picked up my jacket and followed the others. When I got into daylight and fresh air again I looked at my clothes ; they were covered with dust. The others were evidently in the same condition, for they all started to shake their clothes. The dust rose in a cloud. We went to the wash-house. Some had soap, but others had not. Each man was supplied with a piece of soap every Saturday, and those who had not yet spent a Saturday there had to borrow or get on as best they could. One man saw my difficulty and threw me a piece of soap.

" Hang on to that, mate," he said. " I've got a bit more." I thanked him and had a good wash.

In the dining hall I found eight long tables set with knives and forks. Everybody was standing round them, and so we remained until an officer of the home came in and said " grace ". When dinner was served I had a piece of corned beef, a potato and some beans. There was a plate of bread upon the table. Nothing much happened during dinner time, and at one o'clock work started again. At the

basement door I was stopped by the foreman, who told me to wait for him and he would show me how to tie bundles. When he was free he took me to a wooden bundling horse, and told me to fill the rack with sticks. The job consisted of filling a small container with sticks, passing a rope round them, and drawing it tight with a rod. While the sticks were thus held firmly I took a piece of string and tied up the bundle. It seemed easy at first, but I soon found that it was not.

The foreman told me how much I would earn and what would be deducted for my keep. If I did nine hundred bundles per week I paid for my keep, and all above that number would be credited to me at the rate of a shilling a hundred. I had visions of saving money from the beginning. I tied bundle after bundle as fast as I could, ignoring the dirt and dust, and concentrating on my task. My fingers were soon sore through working with the rough creosoted string. I did not keep count of the bundles, but just placed them in rows above each other as I did them. At half-past four some men came round and counted the bundles into baskets. As they took them the tally was entered into a book, and each man chalked the number on the side of his horse.

Mine were counted. "Forty-two," the checker shouted to the man with the book.

I looked aghast.

"Forty-two?" I said. "Why, I've been going hard at it all the afternoon without rest."

The man nodded his head. "Don't I know that? It's real good for a beginner."

This cheered me a little, but on reflection I realized that I must do much better if I wanted to clear the nine hundred mark. We worked on until five o'clock, then, after a wash we went in to tea. This consisted of a mug of hot tea and two slices of bread and dripping. While we were at tea an orderly came round and told me I was to have a bath to-night, so I was not to go out.

"Get down there by six and you won't have to rush for the service," he said.

I promised him I would be at the bathroom early, and was as good as my word. But I found that there was no real hurry, as the service was not until nine o'clock.

Supper at quarter to nine consisted of any tea that had been left over from five o'clock, and a slice of bread and dripping. Until supper time I had not found anyone inclined to be friendly. No one seemed anxious to talk. It was not till we were lining up to go to the chapel that a young lad spoke to me.

"What do you think of this dump?" he asked.

I told him I was not favourably impressed yet awhile, but hoped to do better.

"Are you on a ticket?" he asked.

I did not understand, so he explained that he had been in trouble with the police, and had been sent there as an alternative to going to prison. He would have to stay there until he had permission to leave. If he left without permission he would receive a severe sentence of imprisonment.

My sympathies went out to this lad right away. I thought it hard that he should be compelled to

stay at such a place against his will. Our talk centred round the problem of getting the full quota of bundles tied in a week.

" The highest number I've seen done in a week is eleven hundred and fifty," he told me, " and that was in the nature of a record. I can tie all right. It's cutting up the wood and gathering it that holds me back."

I looked at my fingers, sore with tying the string. A partnership seemed to be indicated. If he preferred to tie the bundles I would be willing to do the rest, and between us we might increase our output. We talked it over during service, and by the time we went to bed we had agreed that we would work together and share the result.

When I went up to the bedrooms a man was waiting to show me my bed. It was comfortable enough as a bed, but there was a decided shortage of blankets. On the wall above it was a brass plate with the name of the donor. I noticed that each bed had a brass plate above it.

My new friend and I started off with a will in the morning. Both of us did our level best, not only the first but every day. The monotonous routine day after day was relieved by chats while we were working. By the end of the week we were seventy-five bundles in hand, and on the following Saturday we each had a surplus of two hundred and seventy-five bundles. This represented a cash balance of two shillings and ninepence.

My friend told me that if I applied at the office for a sale room ticket, I would be able to go to the headquarters and get some clothes. He told me I

would get a clean jacket for a shilling, and possibly a pair of trousers for another shilling.

I made the application and was granted a ticket. When I visited the sale room I found there was plenty of clothing to choose from. All the clothes had been collected from various people and had been priced. Certainly some good bargains were available. On my way back to the home it occurred to me that although I had worked like a nigger for two weeks I was still penniless. This made me do some hard thinking, and on arrival at the home I looked for my friend to have a talk with him. I had produced over two thousand bundles of wood for this charity organization and my reward was board and bed, plus the clothes I had just bought.

I made up my mind to leave the home, for if I went on working I would lose all possible chance of getting a job outside.

The morning I left I counted the days since I was last in any London casual ward. It was two nights under the month, so, unless I wanted to be detained five nights, I would have to keep out of one for two days more.

I spent the night on the Embankment, and, at day-break, I left London to look for work in the provinces.

CHAPTER FIVE

I HAD heard vaguely of the Great North Road, and that it was reached through Watford and St. Albans. With the intention of going " North " I made my way towards Watford. I was tired and hungry, so I did not make much progress on the first day. I had not gone very far when night fell, and I sat down to rest and fell asleep.

A policeman found me there, and after hearing my story took me along to the nearest workhouse. He pressed the bell of a big iron gate, and out of a little wooden office came an old pauper with a key.

The policeman looked at him and said :

" Is the Master in ? "

" Yes, sir. Will you go into the hall ? "

We passed across the yard and into the hall. After locking the gate, the pauper followed us and asked us to wait until he fetched the Master. A few minutes later a man of about fifty came to us.

" Good-evening, sir," said the policeman, touching his helmet. " I found this youngster sitting on the roadside. He's homeless, so I thought this would be the best place for him."

The Master looked at me and then at the policeman.

" There's the casual ward. That's all I can do for him. I'll tell the porter to take him across."

" But you won't put this lad among the tramps, will you ? " said the policeman, as if disgusted.

" Where do you think I can put him ? In my drawing room ? " asked the Master sarcastically. The policeman stared at him.

" Well, I know it's your business," he said, " but I'm sure you have some empty beds, and I think it would do no harm to let this kid sleep in one. Still, I've done my duty, and I expect you'll do yours. Good-night."

The policeman left me in charge of the Master and went away. The Master was very annoyed at being spoken to like that, and he vented his spleen upon me.

" This is a nice way of living," he said. " A tramp before you should have left school. Still, if you like the life when we've done with you, well, you're welcome to it."

He rang the bell, but nobody came to answer it. He opened the front door and bawled across to the small office :

" Charles ! Take this boy over to the tramp ward."

The pauper came to me and said :

" Follow me, mate. It's dark, but keep close and it'll be all right." He led me across a dark yard, through a wooden gate, along a very narrow passage, and stopped outside a door and rang a bell. " You stay here till someone comes," he said. " Don't ring the bell too often, or else you'll get into trouble."

He made off, and left me under the impression that he would rather be anywhere else than at the door of this casual ward. I waited fully ten minutes for someone to come, then I rang the bell again.

" All right," came a voice from inside. " You're

in a bloody hurry, ain't yer ? You should have been earlier if you can't wait a few minutes."

I expected the door to open then, but I had another wait of five minutes. When at last it did open, in the doorway stood a fat, pugnosed individual dressed up in a uniform. He looked out over my head as if he expected someone else.

" Who's been making all this noise ? " he demanded.

" I rang the bell," I said. " That's all the noise I made."

" Who let you in ? " he asked.

I told him how I came to be at the door asking for a shelter.

" Come on in then, and close the door." He walked over to a desk and stood by it. It was like the desk to be seen in the charge room of any police station.

He opened a book, and demanded to know my name, age, occupation, where I had slept last night, and where I was going to in the morning. Having got through this examination he came round and searched me. Every pocket lining was turned inside out. He looked into my boots and rubbed his hand round my cap. He seemed quite disappointed at the result of his search.

" Get in there and have a bath," he said, showing me into the bathroom.

There were two baths in the room. An old pauper was in charge whose job it was to turn on the water and hand out the towels. The water was lukewarm, but looked muddy. I realized afterwards that this same lot of water had been used by others that night.

The towel was wet and dirty. When I had dried myself as best I could I looked for my clothes, but they had been taken away, and the old pauper stood holding a shirt for me to put on. It looked just like a sack, and felt like one when it was on me. The porter appeared again and shouted :

" Ready ? Come on then." He led me to a cell.

The bathroom was draughty, but it was nothing compared with the passage I had to walk along. With only a shirt on I had to walk barefoot over a stone floor. The wind was blowing through broken windows, and at one end the door was open. My teeth chattered and I felt extremely cold.

" Get in there," said the porter, showing me into a cell.

The cell stank terribly. I found two blankets in a corner, but nothing else with which to make a bed. The floor was of stone, and this and the two blankets made my bed for the night. I thought of Kate's bed and her warm body as we used to cuddle together. It was too much for me. I sat down on the blankets, and would have cried right out if my cell door had not been opened again at that moment.

" Here's your supper," said the porter, pushing something in and slamming the door again.

I heard a bolt shot into its socket, then all was quiet. I picked up a mug and a plate with some bread and margarine on it, and went back to the blankets. The mug was heavy, and thinking it had something to drink in it, I placed it to my lips. But, to my sorrow, I found it was not drink at all, but a soft, sticky substance. This was my first introduction to " Spike Skilly " : " Spike " being

slang for a casual ward, and " skilly " a gruel which is supposed to have some relationship to porridge.

To describe spike skilly is almost impossible, because outside a spike there is nothing like it. The nearest approach to it would be a pot of bill-poster's paste touched up with a little washing blue, smelling like stale washing water and tasting strongly of soap.

This " spike " was noted for its " skilly ". I found out afterwards that the porter used to make several gallons of this stuff at a time, boiling it up every day until it was all eaten by the unfortunate tramps. Hungry as I was that night I could not eat the skilly, but did manage the bread. I was very thirsty, and knocked at the door for a drink of water. I knocked loud and long, but the door was not opened again until the morning. I laid one blanket on the floor, rolled the other round me, and tried to get some sleep. I spent hours in the darkness and silence, but it was not daybreak when my cell door was opened and I was told to get up.

When I got to the wash-house I found six other men there. They were all of the " Old Roadster " type. Not one could have been under seventy.

I waited my turn to get a wash, but when it came I found that there was no soap and for drying purposes there were only the wet dirty towels which had been used overnight. Before I had finished washing myself a shout came from the other end of the passage.

" Come on, now. Here's your breakfast."

There was a general move towards two large cans, which had been put on forms stretching across the passage. There were twenty men for breakfast that

morning, some of them as old as those I had first seen, and others about forty years of age. Some looked like working men, while others seemed so hopelessly " down and out " that death would have been a blessing to them.

We were each given a hunk of dry bread, a small piece of margarine, and one pint of " skilly ". The sight of mine made me feel sick. I saw some of the men dump theirs down a drain and fill their mugs with water. I followed suit.

Now it was daylight I had a better view of the cells. All of them had stone floors, and at the back of each was a " stone-cell " about five feet square. Here the casuals were locked in with a hammer and a heap of stones, and not released until they had broken up the stones and passed them through a grating in the wall. The amount of stones to be broken varied according to their nature, but the average would be four hundredweight.

At four o'clock each night all the men who had finished their task were released and given skilly and bread. Those who had not were charged with " Refusing or failing to perform his allotted task ". Many men have been sent to prison on this charge, even after doing their best throughout the day.

This casual ward was one of the worst in England. I learned later that it was only used by the " regulars " because it was so close to London. It has been the scene of many battles between tramps and the officials of the Institution.

One of the funniest things I saw there was when a crowd of tramps revolted against the skilly. At that time several casual wards were supplying cocoa

instead of skilly at one meal, while others had actually begun to give cocoa at one meal and tea at another. That morning one man stood up and addressed us thus :

" Look here, boys, it's about time this little skunk of a master was taught a lesson. He's about the worst workhouse master in the south of England, and I want to know how many of you are coming with me to give him a bath of this bloody filth he dishes up for us to eat ? "

The speech caused a mild sensation. The men looked at one another for a lead. One enthusiast jumped up and said :

" Blimy, I'll make one to plaster the bastard with a dishful."

" Sure," said another. " We'll help. If we all go to ' Stir ' it'll be better than this lousy life. Count on me, mate."

I began to feel excited. Remembering the way he had abused me at my first interview, I had a strong desire to be the first to throw the skilly in his face. I was too slow in thinking. An old man who, even at that time, was wearing two rows of medal ribbons, picked up his skilly and said :

" Boys ! Talk is cheap, but it takes guts to throw this over the gaffer's thick head. I'm going to do it. Who's helping me ? "

This speech spurred us all on. We agreed to go with the " old 'un " and protest against the vile stuff that was regularly served up for tramps to eat. The old man leading, we all made our way into the main building. Luckily for us the gate that should have been locked was open. None of the officials were

aware of anything amiss until we all filed into the main hall of the institution. Then a porter who had spotted us came running over. " What are you men doing this side ? " he yelled.

" Mind your own bleeding business," retorted the old man. " We want the Gaffer, and it's the Gaffer we're going to get."

The assistant master, a cocky little fellow about four foot six, stalked across to us.

" Clear out of here, you men. You've got no business to be this side of the house."

" Go to hell, you slimy bastard. If you want some skilly you can have it. Where's the Gaffer ? " the old man yelled.

" I'm the master for the time being. Until nine o'clock anyway," answered the assistant master.

" Well," said the old man. " Do you think this stuff fit to eat ? " and he held out the bowl of skilly.

" Yes," he replied. " I wish I had some for my breakfast every morning."

This taunt was the last straw. The old man raised high the bowl and dropped it over the head of the assistant master, with :

" Take that, you bloody swine, and I hope it chokes you."

Though dramatic, the scene had its funny side. The man never looked " swell " at the best of times, but now, with filthy skilly running over his hair and ears, down his jacket and on to the floor, he looked ridiculous. The tramps rushed back to the casual ward. When we came to the gate dividing the two sides of the workhouse one of the men stopped to

prop a piece of wood against it, so that anyone following would have to climb over or go round to the front and come in by the side gate.

Once in the ward, our next problem was how to protect the old man from arrest. The property cupboard was broken open and the old 'un's property taken out for him. Then we helped him over the wall, he dropped to freedom, and made his escape. A few moments after the old man had got away four officials came into the casual ward and started a search for him. None of us would tell where he was, and after promising us all the punishments of hell they returned to the house. A little later the casual ward porter came over. He was obviously in a rage. No doubt the assistant master had placed the responsibility for the outrage on his shoulders, because he was responsible for the gate being left open.

Into the casual ward he came, stamping and fuming. Slamming the door, he yelled :

" You'll bloody well suffer for this, you bastards. Taking liberties when I'm at breakfast ! Get into your cells, every one of you."

No one moved an inch.

" Do you hear, you lazy sons of bitches ? Get into your stone cells. I'll give you complaining about your food."

One man stepped forward, and with a single smashing blow to the belly he knocked the porter flat on his back.

" I'll take no nonsense from a fat-gutted professional porter like you," he said. Before the official could get up or say another word an old man,

who must have been well over seventy, stepped up and spat right into his face.

" Ten long years of torture I've suffered through you," he declared. " Take that ! "

Old as he was, he had the strength to kick the porter's ribs hard enough to make him cry out with pain.

Although I did not know it at the time, we had all rendered ourselves liable to imprisonment. In the eyes of some J.P.'s to assault a workhouse porter is almost as bad as murder.

As the property cupboard was already broken open, the obvious thing for us all to do was to clear out before anyone could raise the alarm.

Outside the gate the men scattered in all directions.

" Which way do you want to go, mate ? " one asked me.

" Anywhere," I said, " so long as I can get out of this hell hole."

" Well, cross these fields and you'll get to the St. Albans Road. Then you'll be safe. So long."

He hurried off in another direction, but I saw a couple take to the fields in front of me, so I followed them. I went across fields, through gates and over hedges, until at last I came to a main road. As I got over the last fence I saw the two I had followed sitting by the roadside.

" Where are you heading for ? " one of them asked.

" I don't know yet," I replied. " Where can I go by this road ? "

" You can choose between Watford and St. Albans," he said. " Watford's about seven miles and St. Alban's ten."

I chose St. Albans and asked my way. They gave me directions, then one of them said :

" Got any tea and sugar, or a ' drum ' ? "

I must have looked a little puzzled, because he went on :

" Blimey, new to the game, I bet ! Here, take my drum, and this ' mashing ', and see you don't get caught without one any more. Why, kid, you'll starve if you don't carry a drum. Unless, of course, you like skilly," he added with a smile.

He handed me a tin. Inside it was a little screw of paper containing tea and sugar mixed. The tin was black with fire-smoke, and for a handle it had a piece of thin wire attached to two holes in the sides.

" Knock at any door," he told me. " You can always beg hot water. Don't take the tea out of the paper ; if the lady's decent she'll put some of her own in the can. That lot's lasted me for two weeks now, so it's time I had a change."

I thanked him and set off with my first item of " Tramp's Kit ". As I was moving away the other tramp shouted after me :

" When you get to ' Billy Ricky ' let him stamp it for you."

For a long time I was under the impression that the gentleman mentioned was one who marked such drums so that they could be distinguished from others. But when I was travelling in Essex some time later I found out that " Billy Ricky " was a spike. At the casual ward in Billericay was a porter who strongly objected to tramps bringing in their drums. To give strength to his objection he would

place any he found on the floor and stamp on them. This procedure is the source of much amusement to the tramp fraternity. If a tramp up North is seen stepping out at a good pace in a southerly direction, any fellow tramp he passes is sure to hail him with some such remark as :

" Hi, mate ! Leave some for us," indicating that he is not to pick up all the cigarette ends he sees. And frequently he replies :

" I don't want any ' snipes ' ; I've got a new drum and got to go to ' Billy Ricky ' to get it stamped."

It was a keen morning, and I was soon striding along at a smart pace, heading for St. Albans. I tramped until about one o'clock, when I thought I would try the plan of getting some tea made. Just ahead of me were some houses, so I resolved to chance my arm at the first one. To make a resolution when you're a long way off your objective is fairly easy, but the trouble starts when you reach the door.

Before I arrived I felt that all I had to do was to go up to the door and knock. I soon found out my mistake. A funny feeling came over me as I got near the door. " After all," I thought, " perhaps there's no one in at this one; I'll try the next." I went to the next, and glanced up at the chimney pots. There was no smoke from any of them, so I decided that there would be no chance of hot water there. I went on to the next. Right along the little row of houses I went, and at the end I was still without tea. Not because I had been refused, but because I had not plucked up courage to go and ask for it.

I sat down to think things over. I had the drum and I had the tea and sugar, so all I wanted was some boiling water. But I could not pluck up courage to go to a stranger's door and ask for hot water.

I told myself it was wrong to beg. I argued that I might disturb someone from an afternoon nap. Many and varied excuses I found to justify my not asking for hot water. But to all was the one reply, unanswerable in its logic :

" How the hell can you get your tea made if you don't go and ask ? "

I decided to try it. I walked boldly up to a door and raised my hand to the knocker. To this day I believe that if the door had not opened at that moment I would have walked away without knocking. A grey-haired old lady stood in the doorway.

" What do you want, sonny ? " she asked.

" Pl—pl—please lady, can I have some hot water ? "

" Hot water ! " she said, in a surprised tone. " Hot water is no use to a tramper boy. What he wants is a good can of tea and some food to eat with it. Are you alone ? "

" Yes," I replied.

" Well, come in and sit down while I boil the kettle."

I stepped into a very neat and comfortable room. Immediately I sat down a very large cat jumped on to my lap and started purring. The warmth of the room and the old lady's talk soon made me feel at home, and at her invitation I sat and rested a while.

" That's a black can you've got, sonny. I bet it could tell some stories if it could only talk. How long have you had it ? "

She was surprised to hear I had only had it a few hours, but a look of understanding came over her face as I told her how I had come to get it.

" I have a better one than that you can have, an old snuff tin. If you don't put it on a fire you'll get more women to give you tea. A black can like that will make a dirty mark on the tablecloth. And that won't do, for if you upset a lady she won't put any milk in your tea."

This old girl was showing a great understanding of tramps and their difficulties, and I made a mental note always to use a clean can. I found later that it was impossible to keep a can clean, because there are times when you have to light a fire if you don't want to go off your track a few miles to get to a house. I solved the problem by having two : one for the fire and the other for " calling ".

The kettle soon boiled, and the old lady made some tea. She went to the cupboard and made a meat sandwich for me, and also brought out some cakes. I enjoyed my meal, and after an hour's rest I started off again the richer by sixpence, a new drum, a quarter-pound of tea and one pound of sugar.

" Call again, my lad, when you're round this way, and never mind the ' Bobby,' " she said in parting.

I felt like a new being as I set off on the next stage of my journey. I did not call at any more houses that day, and as evening came on I pressed forward, hoping that soon I would see the town I was making for. I arrived at the Market Place about six o'clock, and asked a policeman the way to the spike.

" You mean the ' Grubber ', don't you ? " he answered.

I remembered the title " casual ward ", and found that that was what he meant. As he was giving me directions an old tramp with a sack across his shoulder passed us.

" There now," said the policeman, " you follow that chap there, and you'll be all right." Then, as if he had remembered something, he added :

" If he goes in any of the shops don't go after him, or you may find yourself down at the police station."

I followed the old tramp. The policeman must have known him, for he called at the baker's, the butcher's, the grocer's, and the fish and chip shop. From each he gathered a small parcel. At last he led me to where some men and women were lined up in the shadow of a high wall, stamping their feet and rubbing their hands to keep warm. As we approached the crowd the tramp I had followed hailed someone he knew.

" So Tubby's late again," he said. " Why the hell can't he open on time ? He's keen enough to keep us till the clock strikes afore he lets us go in the morning."

" Oh, he ain't so bad," said one of the others. " He does try to make things bearable."

I was glad to hear that, for it sounded as if this casual ward was not so bad.

There was a round of mock cheering from the men near the gate, and we filed into a great yard. We all lined up, and I had my first glimpse of " Tubby ", as he was affectionately known among tramps throughout the country. He called out for us to

make bundles of our tobacco, cigarettes, matches, etc., to be kept until morning. Tubby hardly ever properly searched a man, but often he could detect that a tramp had hidden something on his person.

An amusing story is told about this porter. One day he listened to the conversation of the tramps as they were lined up outside the gate. He heard such remarks as :

" Hide it in your boots, Tubby can't bend," or " Put it in your crutch. Tubby can't reach there." So when he had that night's batch of men lined up, he went from one to another and picked out various men who appeared to be ruptured or whose boots were swollen. As he came to each man he exclaimed :

" Fetch it out ! Tubby can't bend."

After we had handed in our bundles the routine of " booking " was gone through. As the questions to be asked are standard throughout the country, the men give the answers all in one word before being asked the questions. For example one man called out :

" Tomsmithsixtyfourlabourerwatfordtolutonnomoney."

That mouthful would mean that his name was Tom Smith, his age sixty-four, his occupation was a labourer, he had travelled from Watford, on discharge would proceed to Luton, and had no money.

When my turn came I was not ready to " spiel " off the answers, and this caused Tubby to look up from his ledger. He was about to give me a mouthful in real workhouse style, when he became aware of my obvious youth and lack of experience. His face

softened, he looked down at the book, then up at me again.

" What's your name, son ? " he said gently, then went through the list of questions in a manner no one could take exception to. When he asked where I was going to I could not give an answer, for I had no idea where my next stop would be.

" Book to Luton, son," he advised. " It's a short journey, and you won't tire yourself out."

I booked to Luton, and was led to the bathroom.

The bathroom here was as clean as the one at the previous spike was dirty. Each man had fresh water, and was supplied with a clean towel and nightshirt. Cocoa was supplied instead of " skilly " at night, and tea was given in the morning.

The cells were the black spot of the ward. There were so many tramps that there was serious overcrowding. Men slept wherever they could, some on the beds in the cells, some underneath them, while others slept in the passage ways. The cells, which were built for one, were in most cases occupied by two, and in some there were three or even four occupants. I, with others, settled down in a passage. I had three blankets, and put my boots for a pillow. Sleep was out of the question for an hour or two, for there were about a hundred and fifty men all wanting to speak at once. Men meeting after many weeks would want to know what each had done during that period. Strangers to the district would be asking particulars of the " good " and " bad " spikes. There were some shouting to others many yards away for details of work going, or where so and so was travelling. I lay quiet and listened for any bits

of information which might be of use later. I heard many strange names mentioned that night, and in my travels have come across most of them. The stories I heard and the advice I was given filled me with optimism, so that in the morning I was ready for anything the road had to offer me. I had early chanced upon one of the best " spikes " in the country, and so, not knowing what the future held in store for me, I started off with a good heart.

My journey was delayed only by the time it took to perform my task. By law we should all have been held for one day to do work, but here we were given the option of doing a set task and then going free. The task was that any two men had to saw one railway sleeper into lengths of eight inches, and everybody was finished by eight forty-five. If the same men had been detained all day I doubt whether they would have done half that amount of work.

For a partner I had a middle-aged man who told me all about " lorry jumping " as a means of doing a long journey in a short time.

It was through jumping on a lorry that I had one of my queerest experiences. I had been seen by a policeman, and he rode his bicycle up to the front and called to the driver to stop. The lorry came to a standstill ; the policeman walked round to the back and pulled me off.

" What are you doing on this vehicle ? " he demanded.

" I'm going to Leicester to look for a job," I said.

" Did the driver know you were there ? " he asked.

" No," I told him. " I jumped on while it was coming up the hill."

This saved the driver, and the policeman told him he could go. As the lorry drove off I had visions of a long walk in the dark, for I knew of no shelter before I got to Leicester.

" Are you tramping ? " asked the policeman.

" Yes," I replied.

" Well, get off to the union," he said, " and don't let me see you again."

I set off along the road the lorry had taken, but the policeman shouted after me :

" Hi ! Where are you off to ? "

" The spike," I replied. " It's at Leicester, isn't it ? "

" No, no," he said. " There's one just up this lane."

My arrival at the casual ward caused a sensation. At the gate I rang the bell. An old pauper came out.

" What do you want ? " he asked.

" The casual ward," I replied.

" The casual ward ? " he said in amazement. " Nobody ever comes to this one."

" Well, here's one who is coming," I said, still feeling bitter because my lorry ride had been stopped. " So hurry up and let me in."

" I don't know what the Master will say," he said. " I've never had a tramp here for months."

An experienced tramp would have taken the hint, and would have searched for a barn to rest in for the night. But I was not yet wise to such things, and determined to stay. I was led to the casual ward, and the old man went off for someone in authority. He came back with a man dressed in a uniform.

" Well, what do you want here ? " he demanded.

" A night's rest," I said.

" Aren't there any other wards in the country, without coming to bother us ? "

I did not understand his question, so I said nothing. He booked me in, then informed me that as there was no hot water I could not have a bath.

" I must try to get you some supper, but I'm not making skilly for one," he grunted.

I did not mind his objection to making skilly, but thought it best not to mention the fact to him. He went to a locker, pulled out a bundle of blankets, and threw them on the floor.

" Take your pick of these," he said, " you'll need plenty."

He went for supper, and I busied myself getting ready for sleep. I took plenty of blankets and made a bed. As there was no heating I knew I should want extra covering. The porter returned with a mug of hot tea and some bread and margarine.

" Here's your supper," he said. " I'll see you in the morning."

With that he closed the door and locked it. I finished my supper and covered myself up well. I intended to get a good night's rest, and as it was still early I had hopes of a long sleep. But after a while I heard the patter of tiny feet, then distinct sounds of squealing and the gnawing of wood. I lay still, holding my breath.

They were rats ! I knocked on the floor and heard them scampering away. There was silence for a while, but then the gnawing started again. I knocked at the door to call the porter, but no one came. I lay back in the blankets and drew some

over my head. I did not dare to sleep, so I just lay and knocked on the floor to keep them away. I could not see any of them, and did not know whether they could get into my cell. The hours rolled on. I was afraid to sleep, but was getting very tired. I felt something warm moving along my leg, and kicked out. It ran off me, and I heard its feet as it passed my head. As no one had answered my knocking I started shouting, and yelled until my throat was sore. But no one came. At last I grew exhausted ; I covered my head again and lay still.

Suddenly I awoke out of a dream in which I was fighting big black, brown and grey rats. My head was sore and I was trembling. As I moved several rats jumped off me and ran into the darkness. I lay in fear for a long time ; I did not dare go to sleep again. I bawled down curses on the head of the porter, and thought of what I would like to do to him in the morning. But when he did come I was so glad to get out of the cell that I quite forgot all my bad designs against him.

" Are you all right lad ? You look as white as a ghost," he stared at me. " What's the matter with you ? You're shaking like a leaf."

I told him of my night's experience.

" The best thing you can do is to clear out to-day. And don't come back. I'll see the Master."

He went away, and an old pauper brought me a mug of tea and some bread and margarine.

" Here, son," he said. " Drink this while I fetch your stones."

I knew it was no use telling this old man so, but if the Master thought I was going to break half a ton

of stones after that night's experience he was mistaken.

The porter returned with a piece of bread and some cheese.

" Here's your mid-day meal," he said. " You can go as soon as you're ready."

It did not take me long to wrap up the bread and cheese and make for the gate. As I passed through the gate I made a vow that I would never return to this spike, and that vow I have kept.

In case any reader doubts what I have said or may say about Britain's casual wards, I insert for their information an extract taken from :

" THE REPORT of the Departmental Committee on The Relief of the Casual Poor. Presented by the Minister of Health to Parliament by Command of His Majesty, July, 1930." Page 38. (Paragraphs 36 to 44 inclusive.)

" 36. The criticisms of the administration of the existing system which we have received are, as a rule, based on the widely varying standards of administration in different casual wards. The orders of the central authority were meant to establish throughout the country a uniform standard of decent accommodation and compliance with a number of well-defined rules concerning bathing, searching, bedding and dietary.

" 37. The evidence we have received shows clearly that many wards fall short of these standards.

" 38. In the first place we find it our duty to record that in a certain number of casual wards the conditions now existing are infamous and intolerable.

Some of the members of our Committee have visited wards where two men are locked in a small cell that was built for one person, and kept there in darkness for 12 or 13 hours.

"39. They have seen at least one casual ward where there are no baths, no clothes for the night are supplied, and each man lies down on a wooden floor dirty and dusty in his own clothes for the night. In others, the sleeping accommodation consisted of a shed which would not on a decent farm be considered fit for an animal of any value. In some wards no heating was provided; in many others there were no day rooms, or, where there were day rooms, they lacked ventilation and were crowded almost to suffocation. In other wards again, there was no yard or exercise ground attached, and men detained throughout Sunday were never allowed to leave the little block of cells where they were incarcerated. On one occasion a casual ward was visited on a Sunday, and the solitary occupant was discovered in the confinement of a small room throughout the day and night. He had only been visited twice between early morning and late evening by the workhouse porter, who gave him his bread and cheese for dinner and his bread and margarine for tea.

"40. These conditions have continued for a number of years; the overcrowding that results in the double occupation of a small cell is not a sudden or exceptional phenomenon, but the regular and expected feature every night for several years.

"41. Defects such as these must have been known to the boards of guardians responsible for the maintenance of the wards, but they have refused

to spend the money necessary to secure even the decencies of life.

"42. Furthermore, while the worst conditions prevail only in a certain number of wards, we have received evidence to the effect that in a large number of wards the regulations of the local authorities are not honestly observed. There are many places where towels, blankets, and sheets are not clean—where the beds or hammocks are so uncomfortable or inadequate as to deprive a man of sound continuous sleep.

"43. Complaints against the food relate not merely to inadequacy but even more to monotony of the diet, the absence of vegetables, the practice prevailing at certain wards of issuing gruel as the only liquid, and the crude way in which meals are served with no forks, spoons or knives.

"44. We were interested to find that in the main the complaints we received on the subject of tasks were not that the tasks imposed are excessive, but that they are frequently so trivial or so useless that the men feel that they are degraded in having to waste their time upon them. As one witness said:

> 'The work I saw in the casual wards was a farce. I was only in one casual ward where the work was well organized. We chopped firewood like the Church Army—that seemed to be entirely good—but as a rule it was loitering about waiting to be let out. It was simply being bored stiff, waiting and waiting and waiting.'"

A tramp does not spend all his life in casual wards. For the best part of the summer he sleeps out;

choosing his spots well away from the main roads, he has his regular " rough-uns ". One night it may be on the sands of the seashore, the next in a forest. Hayricks and barns provide comfort for many a weary traveller. Some nights, however, one has to act according to " circumstances permitting ". When it blows hard or starts to rain the tramp has to seek shelter.

I remember that one night I was sleeping in a field, and awoke to find it was raining heavily. I got up and ran towards some trees for cover. As I stood under a tree I noticed a small shed a few yards off, and decided to see if there was more suitable shelter there. Slowly I crept up to the shed. The door was partly open, so rather than chance making a noise by opening it farther, I edged my way in. I dropped to my knees and felt my way. The shed had a small window, but outside it was quite dark. The floor was dry, and after feeling for something to lie on, but finding nothing, I stretched myself on the floor and went to sleep. When I awoke next morning I realized my mistake. All around me were chickens. I sat up and looked at my clothes. I had lain right under a perch, and from my head to my toes were two lines of droppings !

I started to clean myself, but found that the more I tried the greater the mess I made. I stood up and looked around to see if I could see anybody, or anything, that suggested a way out of my difficulty. There was only one house in sight, and as the owner of the chickens obviously lived there I decided not to knock at that door. It is said that when a pigeon drops something on your hat it is a sign of luck, but

I learned that it is equally true when the bird is a chicken. My luck was in that morning. Two miles up the road I saw some washing hanging out to dry. I looked it over, and saw that as well as shirts and ladies' underwear there was a set of overalls. I glanced up at the chimney-pot and saw no smoke, which, in the early morning, is a sure sign that no one is up and about. I looked for a dog, but there wasn't one. So I climbed over the fence and took down a shirt, the overalls and, as there were no pants, I added a pair of flannel bloomers. Rolling them into a bundle I made off, looking for a place where I could change.

I came to a small thicket, and in the cover of this I regained a respectable appearance.

Expecting rain one night, I went into a shed in the middle of a field. It was dusk, but I could see straw poking out of the shed, so I was sure I would find a comfortable bed. To my surprise, when I opened the door I found two donkeys tethered inside. They gave me an indignant look to show their disapproval of strangers, and tugged at their halters. That gave me an idea. If I released the animals they would go out into the field, then I could shut the door and have a good sleep. I untied them, and they both trotted out. Closing the door, I gathered some straw together and lay down to sleep. An ordinary human being would have stayed in the field all night and let me sleep. Not so those donkeys. In the early hours of the morning they both decided to come home. Finding the door locked against them, they began to kick in the side of the shed. And they made the devil of a noise doing it, braying

and screaming as only donkeys can. If the owner was within five miles he surely would hear the din, I thought. I did not want to risk being caught, so I reluctantly allowed the donkeys to come in and continued my journey along the road.

A tramp's life varies in regard to work. While there are some who would not work for any consideration, most of them turn their hand to something now and again. There are the " long jobs " that last from two weeks to two months, such as harvesting, peas, hay, or corn, picking fruit or potatoes, or digging up sugar-beet. The more popular jobs are those " odd jobs " which bring in a few shillings. At one time in Derby I chummed up with a " journeyman gardener ". At least that is what he used to " book in " as, but I have never seen him do more than cut hedges and mow lawns. He was a very quiet old man, and had a gift for making brilliant remarks at times. His one great joy was to tell how he kept himself supplied with good food by his own labours. After I had been with him a day or two I challenged him on the subject. I told him that the best food we had had was four pennyworth of " scrag ends " from butchers. He listened calmly to my challenge, and said :

" Sonny, I can honestly say that I have not missed any meal for years." Then, by way of explanation, he added : " Of course I have postponed a few, but I shall catch up some day."

While we were in Derbyshire he led me to the front door of a large house. He rang the bell and asked for the lady. When she came he touched his hat.

" Any work this morning, lady ? " he said. " Hedge-cutting, lawn mowing, digging, or any job for two ? "

She looked at him, then at me.

" Yes," she said. " I think I'll have the lawn cut to-day."

We looked at the lawn. There was nearly a quarter-acre of it. The lady led the way. Stopping in the middle of the lawn, she said to my friend :

" If you cut this nicely I'll give you a shilling and your boy sixpence."

He gave her one indignant look, and replied :

" Lady, it's not your lawn that wants cutting."

We left that job and went on our way.

The most amusing experience I had with this man happened when he was searching for work one day. A man told us to go with him and he would give us a job. He took us to a house which had a high hedge, and a large lawn which was obviously being neglected.

" Make a good job of this, my men," he said. " Trim the hedge, cut the lawn and weed the banks. I shall be round again soon to see how you're shaping."

As he was moving off my friend called out to him :

" What's the pay, guvnor, on this job ? "

" Ten shillings a day for each of you," he replied.

This gave us a good heart. We both set to work to make a good job of it, hoping that it would lead to something else. I went down on my knees to pull up weeds, while my friend started on the hedge. After we had been working for about an hour a policeman came up and looked at us. After a while

he went off, but later came back with a sergeant. They both stood for a minute or two, then came in to us.

" How's it going, boys ? " said the sergeant.

" Oh, all right, ' sarj ',' said my friend. " Would you like to help ? "

The sergeant had a comical smile on his face as he said :

" I'd like to help all right, but first of all help me by telling me what you are doing here in this empty house."

We told him how we had got the job and what we were to be paid.

" Can you describe the man ? " asked the sergeant.

We gave a full description of our employer, and both the policemen smiled.

" Well," said the sergeant, " if you want to draw your money you had better come with us."

We were taken to the police station. I had visions of prison, but could not think what crime we had committed. The sergeant spoke to the inspector, and he telephoned somewhere. After a while the inspector called us up and asked us to sign for ten shillings each. As he gave us the money he told us the story. It appeared that our " employer " was a harmless lunatic, who assumed the rôle of " employment officer " for the district, and we were not the first to be " set to work " in this manner. Fortunately for us his people were well off, and they were thankful that we were ready to accept a day's pay for an hour's work and say no more about it.

This same pal told me of a young tramp who had been informed that the best results when " begging "

were always obtained by means of a very brief story. One day he was in need of practically everything. With so many wants he found it difficult to think of a speech which would include them all yet not be too long. At last he went up to a door, and poured out to the lady who opened it :

" Please lady will you give me a drink for I'm that hungry I don't know where I'm going to sleep to-night."

CHAPTER SIX

THE great majority of those " on tramp " in Britain are men and boys, but, though the women are less in number, they are a varied lot. There are the regular women who, through drink, privations, etc., have been on the road for years. Then there are the young domestics and women who lose their jobs and have nowhere to go, or who become " unmarried mothers " and are forced out of society to become vagrants. Between these two types are a few who have been driven on to the road by other circumstances.

I met one of this type as I was coming away from Stamford in Lincolnshire in 1922. She was sitting at the roadside, drinking tea. As I gave her a nod she called out and asked if I would like a drink.

I was quite ready for some tea, so I accepted the invitation. I had with me my mid-day meal of eight ounces of bread and two ounces of cheese, and I sat down to an open-air lunch.

" Have you been on the game long ? " she asked.

" A few years," I replied. " I made an early start."

" About the same time as me," she said.

I was struck by the tone of her voice and her general manner. Her voice was not harsh, and, unlike so many women on the road, she could talk without the help of blasphemous or indecent words.

She looked quite young, her complexion was fresh, and her hair was jet black. She was the picture of good health. Her clothes were sound and sensible ; instead of the several frocks and petticoats worn by the " old roadsters ", she had a thick tweed skirt and a warm woolly jersey, and over these was a very serviceable raincoat. She had black woollen stockings, and a pair of stout, well-soled walking shoes. A heavy woollen grey tam-o'-shanter lay on the grass beside her. All her belongings were carried in a small haversack.

The tea was good, and, to my surprise, there was no methylated spirits in it. There aren't many women on the road who do not take " meth " with all liquids.

" A good drop of ' char ' this," I said. " Better than plenty made for the Sergeant-Major."

" Sure," she returned, smilingly. " A good drop of tea takes the rough edges off this sort of life. Doesn't it ? "

" How old are you ? " she went on.

" Twenty-two," I replied. " About the same as you, eh ? "

" Have another guess," she said. " And the closer you get to thirty the nearer you'll be right."

That was a great surprise to me. I had always imagined that a woman of thirty was getting on, but this one showed no signs of it. I liked her smiling face, and I felt I could trust her. Until that moment I had always been uncomfortable in women's company. I had seen their drunken brawls and heard their talk, and their general behaviour disgusted rather than interested me. Only

one woman had gained my respect, and that was Kate.

" Where are you making for ? " she asked. I told her I was going to Peterborough, to see if I could get any fruit-picking to do.

" I'm going that way, too. Can I walk with you ? " she asked.

I agreed, and we set off together. Now that she was on her feet I could see how tall she was. There was very little difference between the two of us. Both of us were travelling light, content with a haversack to carry our belongings. I knew the advantages of an old pram and a tent, but I preferred a light pack and fast travelling. We started off at a steady jog of about three miles per hour.

" My name's Alice," she said. " What can I call you ? "

" Call me Bill," I answered, and on we went, talking nineteen to the dozen, for as it was our first meeting we had a good deal to talk about.

" Have you ever travelled with a woman before ? " she asked.

" No," I told her. " I haven't before found any I could enjoy travelling with."

" Well, you know we might think the same about some men," she replied. " But when two can join together it's for the benefit of both. Have you ever been married ? "

" No," I said. " I'm only twenty-two, you know."

" That's nothing," she said, " lots of people are married before they are twenty-two. I was myself. But that's all finished now."

She was silent for a while, but broke out with the sudden question :

" Shall we travel together for a bit and see if we get on with each other ? A lonely life is hell to me, especially in winter time."

The question came as rather a shock. I had heard lots of talk about men and women travelling together, but it had never occurred to me that I might do so one day. In a flash I realized that this girl would be far more congenial company than many men. She was not of the harlot type, and I enjoyed talking to her. So, without thinking twice, I replied :

" I'd be glad to have your company."

Then and there we decided to go shares in everything. We talked of how we came to be on the road. She told me her husband had gone off to live with another woman. I asked if she could not claim money for her maintenance, but she smiled and said :

" I could if I wanted to, but I don't. If he wants someone else more than me, well, he can have her. I wouldn't have stayed with him if I hadn't cared for him. If I took money from him for my keep it would mean that he and his new partner would have to go short of something. I prefer to be free, and make a clean break with him if I can't have his regard. And that applies to us two also. If either of us gets tired of the other's company let's say so, and we can go our own way. There's no need to make a fuss or a row. After all, we have no choice as to who we like and who we dislike."

I was amazed to find that I agreed with Alice. Of all the women I had met on the road she was the only one with whom I was ready to chum up. Since

I had not seen her before my decision could not have resulted from any knowledge of her, and similarly I had little or no knowledge of those whom I disliked. It had not been of our own free choice that we had met that afternoon.

" When we claim the right to do as our conscience dictates, then we must allow that right to everyone else," she said. " I want to be free, and I want all my actions to be voluntary. If I have the liberty to choose for myself and I do, then I alone am responsible for the results of my free acts. Believing this, I must grant my husband the right to choose between me and others, and refrain from doing anything which would make his choice more difficult."

This was a new idea to me, but I could not help admitting that it sounded like common sense.

" Where shall we stay to-night ? " she asked. " The ' spike ' is about the best place I know of in Peterboro', and that's not up to much."

I had to confess that I had no knowledge of a clean place to sleep in, so we agreed to go to the casual ward for the night's shelter. The road was good for walking, so we got along fast. It was dusk as we came to the outskirts of Peterboro'.

As we drew near to the town we saw lots of couples with old prams loaded with sacks and cooking utensils. At fruit-picking time many of the pickers keep out of the spikes and seek shelter wherever they can. Peterboro' is a popular place for shelter. It has a thriving brickmaking industry, and you can always find a warm shelter in an empty kiln.

" There'll be a crowd up at the brickyard to-night," said Alice. " I suppose the police will start their

raids if too many try to stop there. I'd rather have a shakedown in the spike, and take a chance on being detained. I slept in a brick kiln one night, and my clothes were full of dust for days after. I had to take a week-end in a spike to get them washed again."

So we passed the brickworks and went straight into town.

" I think we'd better take the bus to-morrow, and get ahead of this gang," said Alice. " What can you do in the way of gagging ? "

I told her of my experience with Kate, and how I had sung in the street with her.

" Well, ' chanting ' is as good a way as any, so we can do a bit of that," she decided. " What songs do you know ? "

The only " songs " I knew all through were the more popular hymns, but Alice would have none of them. " The crooked priests live by hymn singing," she said, " so I only sing the old favourite songs. You can ' bottle ' until you learn some. We shall get just as much that way, and it won't take us long."

To " bottle " is the slang term for collecting, so I was to take up the same job as I had had with Kate a few years before. We had some tea, then we went to the back streets to start " chanting ". Alice started off with the old favourite, " Danny Boy ". Things did not go well at first, but we stuck to it, and were rewarded by finding a sympathetic street. " Bonny Mary of Argyle " and " My Fiddle is my Sweetheart " fetched the " coppers " both bronze and human. The policeman told us to clear off or he would arrest us, so we moved away from the

district. That evening we collected seven shillings and fourpence, and before we went to the spike Alice showed me a trick which has been useful to me many times since. We pooled all our money and bought a postal order, put it into an envelope, and addressed it to Alice c/o the local post office. As she put it in the pillar box she said with a smile :

" Now they can search as much as they like at the spike, and have all they can find."

It was getting late, so we made our way to the casual ward. " Book to Wisbech," Alice said, " and tell him you're going to work on the apples. Then you'll get out first thing in the morning." After she had " booked in " she came to say good-night, then went across to the women's ward. Peterboro' casual ward, like most in that district, is dirty and cold, and the only reason why tramps use it is because detention is not enforced upon those who are proceeding to the fruit fields. That night the ward was more than full. I was given two blankets, and told to make myself as comfortable as I could on the floor of the passage between two rows of cells. The cells were not locked, and each of them had at least three men in them. There was very little sleep for anyone that night. If anybody wanted to use the lavatory he had to step gingerly over sleeping bodies lying close to one another on the floor. With all the care in the world it was impossible to avoid disturbing some of the sleepers.

To be awakened suddenly is not pleasant at any time, but under such conditions it was not surprising that it led to disturbances. Periodically there would be an uproar, and much swearing, and even kicking

and blows. I was glad when six o'clock came and the door opened, so that we could get a wash and stretch our legs a bit.

By seven breakfast was up ; it consisted of eight ounces of bread and margarine and one pint of tea. At eight o'clock all the men who had booked to the fruit fields were allowed to go.

As I walked down the long lane leading to the main road I saw Alice waiting for me.

" Come on, Bill," she said. " Let's go and get a real cup of tea. That stuff in there is like poison." The idea sounded good to me, so we made our way off to the post office to get our money, then on to a café near the market for breakfast. While we were drinking our tea she told me she knew some people at Wisbech, because she had worked there for three seasons.

" If we take the bus this morning we might get a start to-morrow," she said. We found a bus was leaving at nine o'clock, and by noon we were standing on the central bridge at Wisbech, looking out for the people Alice knew.

There were plenty of farmers and fruit-growers in town, but Alice was particular whom she worked for. She spotted a man she knew. He could not offer work at once, but he told her of another grower who was taking on a gang that morning. We hunted up this man, and were fortunate enough to get a job. He told us to be on the bridge at seven the next morning, and we would be taken to the orchards by a motor lorry. Our next task was to find a shelter, so as to be free before seven in the morning.

" If we go to the spike," said Alice, " they may not let us out in time. So we must try the lodging houses."

We tried all the lodging houses in the town, but there were no empty beds in any of them. Men and women were even sleeping on the kitchen tables, waiting for the chance to get the bed of any who might leave town. At last Alice shrugged her shoulders and said :

" There's nothing for it but to try old Mrs. Flaherty's down by the waterside. She has rooms, I know, but of course she may be full up too."

We went down to the riverside, and along a narrow passage to a row of very old houses facing the water. Alice went through a gate leading into the backyard of one of them, knocked at the door, and was answered by an old lady who hobbled with the aid of a stick.

" Good afternoon, Mrs. Flaherty, have you any room ? " Alice called out to her. The old lady was very deaf, so she had to shout still louder : " Have you got a couple of beds to let for one night ? "

" I ain't got two empty beds my dear, but I've got one big 'un. Who are you with ? "

Alice turned to me and called me over. When the old lady saw me she moved away from the door and invited us in. " Is he your husband ? " she asked.

" Yes and no," Alice replied. " My legal one has gone off with another Jane, so we two are going to see what we can do apple-picking together."

Her explanation was rather unexpected, but I had learnt by now always to follow a cue when one was given. If to accept the temporary dignity of husband to Alice would give us shelter for the night, then I would take the chance. The old lady looked knowing, and said :

" It ain't for me to judge, and as long as you work together for each other's happiness I see nothing in it. All I've got is a big bed for two, and it'll cost eighteen pence apiece."

Before I could approve or disapprove, Alice had clinched the bargain by handing the old lady three shillings.

" All right," she said. " We'll go and get some food, and shall be back early."

Her confidence amused me. In my brief period of friendship with her I had come to realize that she could make up her mind almost in a moment. She had said we would go and get some food, but I was sure that by now we had spent all our money. When we got away from the house I asked her how we were to get money in Wisbech. To " chant " this town in picking-time would be like asking for charity outside a factory which was sorely in need of men.

" Come with me," she answered, " and I'll show you where supper and breakfast is coming from." Gently taking hold of my arm, she added : " Are you afraid of sleeping in that house to-night ? "

I told her I did not think I was afraid, but I did have a funny feeling about it. " Well, you'll be all right," she said. " We'll go and get some money and then get to bed early."

She led me to a fruit-grower's store, and asked for a man named Jack.

" He's out with the lorry now," said the man she had addressed, " and I don't know when he'll be back. Will you leave a message ? "

" No," said Alice, " I'll look for him later."

" Can I help ? " asked the man. " You know me, don't you ? Weren't you at Brownlow's last year ? "

" Yes," she replied, " but you can only help if you can lend this young man a dollar until Saturday. He's starting with us in the morning, and he's got no ' grub stake ' or bed money."

" Sure, I can do that," he said. " Here's eight shillings. That'll last him all right. If he isn't coming in himself on Saturday you can bring it, and then we can have a drink together."

" All right," she answered. " Thanks, we shall be in on Saturday." He gave her the money, and as we walked away she handed it to me.

" That's eight bob we win," she said. " I had to borrow in your name. If I'd asked for myself that ' gentleman ' would have invited me into the office. Did you see his dirty smile when he said he'd have a drink with me ? It's not a drink he wanted, but he's going to get neither."

We went into a provision shop, made some purchases, and left with food for breakfast and the first day at the orchard. Then we went to a café and had some supper.

" We ought to give the old girl sixpence to call us in the morning," she said, " and we won't need to make tea because we can get some at this café early."

It was just half-past six as we made our way back to the house.

" I'll be glad of a long night in bed to-night," said Alice, " for my ribs are sore from that rotten laydown in Peterboro'."

" I shall be glad to get a good long rest too," I answered.

" We can go to bed as soon as we get in," she remarked, " and then we shall have over eleven hours. That should help us catch up some lost sleep."

As we reached the house the old girl was just coming out. When she saw us she rested on her stick and gave a sigh of relief.

" That's good ! " she said. " I did hope you'd be back before I went for a drink. I shan't have to hurry back now."

She opened the door and let us in. " You'll find a candle on that table," she told Alice. " Good-bye. You'll be quiet for hours now."

As she was about to go Alice gave her sixpence, and asked her to call us in the morning.

" Won't you be up when I get back ? " the old girl asked. " Then I'd better show you where you're to sleep." Her " showing " was done by waving her stick in the air and pointing to the far corner of the ceiling. We were to be in the room above that. " Number three," she said. " It's on the candlestick." She went to the door, and added as she made her way out : " As you're going to bed I'll lock the door. No one else will be coming in till late." She closed the door behind her and locked it.

We were alone now. I was experiencing a rather queer feeling, and only wanted to get to bed and sleep. Alice took the candle and led the way upstairs. The top floor consisted of three rooms. Two of them had four single beds, and one had a large double bed. This one was number three, and was to be our sleeping quarters for the night. The room was about twelve feet square, and contained

a washstand, a small table, and two chairs. The floor was covered with lino, and beside the bed was a small rag rug. I was feeling very nervous, and might have run away if Alice had not put her arm around me.

" Come on, Bill," she said. " Don't be afraid. We'll both be asleep in about ten minutes."

She began to undress, but must have read my thoughts, for she said : " You jump into bed, while I have a look at those other two rooms." She went out, half closing the door. Left on my own, I undressed quickly and got into bed. She came back, but before she proceeded to undress she came over to me :

" Listen, Bill. I think I know just how you feel. You've heard lots of crude stories about sex, and you're a bit afraid. So if you like I'll sit up all night, and give you a call at six. There's nothing to fear, but I don't want to do anything you'd rather me not do."

I could not bear the thought of her sleeping in the cold, so I told her I wanted her to come to bed. She pulled the sheet gently over my face, and a few seconds later was beside me in bed. Then I had my first real experience of sex. Alice was very gentle with me, and spoke to me in whispers.

It was a long time before I could bring myself to speak. My brain was in a whirl. Until then I had thought that sexual intercourse between a couple outside the bonds of wedlock was something to be ashamed of. I wanted to talk it over with her, and found her ready to listen sympathetically.

" Come on, now," she said, " let's hear what you

think of it. I couldn't be sure till now that you had not been through this experience before. Do you feel all right ? "

I told her that I felt all right, but what was worrying me was whether I had made a prostitute of her. " Good God, no ! " she smiled. " You don't think I'd have let you do it unless I had wanted you to, do you ? "

" But we aren't married, are we ? " I asked, completely bewildered. " Well, not legally," she replied, " but what difference does a piece of paper make ? We're going to be together now so long as we suit each other, so whether we legalize it or not makes little difference. Don't you see that even if you were legally tied to me I should not let you have relations with me unless I was willing, so it isn't a matter of legality but of inclination."

" But doesn't that make you a prostitute ? " I asked.

" In the eyes of some respectable people it might, but the chances are that those people who criticize us would themselves allow their bodies to be used in return for some advantage. A woman who allows a man to use her body as the price of a job or a home is very little different from the girl who trades her body on the streets."

This all sounded like common sense to me, but at the same time it upset what ideas I had on the subject.

" Now you go to sleep," she said, " and we can talk about it to-morrow."

With my arms entwined round her warm body and my face close to hers I fell asleep. It was not a

continuous sleep, but at six o'clock, when the old girl gave us a call, we were both ready to get up.

" Feeling tired, Bill ? " Alice asked. " Or are you fit for a hard day's work ? "

I smiled. It would have been difficult for me to tell just how I felt. One thing I was sure of now : I had a growing feeling of comradeship towards Alice. In ordinary circumstances, if a girl exposed any part of her body I was repelled ; but now, in the privacy of the bedroom, the sight of Alice entirely undressed hardly embarrassed me. It was the way she did it. She was capable of handling any situation without descending to vulgarity.

When we were washed and dressed Alice said :

" Now for some tea. I'm dry. We can get a good cup at the café, but we shall have to move."

We both hurried. As we came downstairs the old girl was sitting by the fire. " It's a lovely morning and good luck to both of you," she said. We bade her a cheery " good-bye ", and went to the café. Several lorry drivers were having tea, but we found a seat in a corner.

" Well, now that we're partners we must try to get a double berth at the orchard," said Alice. " It will be better that way, because we can keep all our food together."

We drank our tea and made our way to the bridge. When we got to the lorry, we found the driver checking names as the pickers came up.

" Are you together ? " he asked.

" Yes," said Alice.

" That's fine," said the driver. " I've only one double berth left, and those women are rowing about it."

Alice was delighted to get a double berth so easily. A few minutes later a whistle blew, and the driver placed a ladder at the back of the lorry for the pickers to climb up on. There were old men and young men, old women and young women, all carrying a sack or parcel of some description. When all were aboard the ladder was tied to the side of the lorry, and we set off on our journey to the orchards. The lorry was full, for besides the human cargo there was a medley of sacks and parcels, pots, pans and tins.

I asked Alice where we were to get our sacks and tins from, and she said she would show me when we got there. The methylated spirit bottles began to appear, and very soon most of the women were singing bawdy songs.

" You'll see the advantages of a partnership now," Alice whispered to me. " When the crowd gets drunk and noisy we can withdraw from them into our own hut. I hate to think bad of any human being, but some people just disgust me."

I was glad to have Alice for a companion, for I do not think I should have stayed among them without her. It took us about an hour to reach the orchard. By that time most of the gang were drunk. When we began the journey some doubt was expressed whether work would start that day, but now, even if there had been any chance of it, only a few would have been able to " turn to ".

The " ruby wine " had done its evil work. With great difficulty the human cargo was unloaded from the lorry. The foreman came and looked us over. He ignored the drunken crowd, and addressed the

sober ones. " We shan't start picking until the morning," he said. " So get your huts ready. Each person may draw four sacks and as much straw as they require. There are two hot plates, and plenty of wood in the stack. Work starts at seven-thirty in the morning."

His little speech over, he moved away with the driver of the lorry. From a large shed came a loud voice intimating that all who needed sacks could now go and get them. Alice and I went over together to draw ours. The sacks were large and thick. We had four each, and were going off when I heard a shout of " Catch ! " I looked round, and saw that another sack had been thrown towards us. This was an extra large one, and I found it to be two sacks which had been cut open and joined together.

We went in search of the huts. Fortunately there was no scramble for best places, because most of the " married couples " were singing and shouting in their drunken stupor. The " huts " were cubicles of six feet square, partitioned off inside a large shed. They had no roof other than that of the larger shed, but the sides were about seven feet high. Each cubicle had a door which fastened only by a piece of string tied to a nail.

Inside each was a wooden plank which could be used as a rail to prevent the straw from scattering all over the floor. Standing on its edge, this plank fitted into two sockets fixed in the wall. When it was in position it made a bed space of six feet by four, with a depth of one foot. Filled with well-packed straw the space makes a comfortable bed. We laid the largest sack over the straw, and when we went to

bed we got right inside it. We used the other eight sacks as blankets, so we never suffered from the cold. The only means of lighting was by candles stood in jam jars. Because of rats all food has to be kept in tins, so Alice went in search of some and came back with an armful. She chose a cubicle in a corner of the shed, because it was away from the crowd, and also had been well lined with newspapers as a protection against draughts.

We made our bed for the night, then sat down upon it and had some sandwiches. After eating, as there was no work that day we made for the village store, about a mile away. Here we bought some clean cooking-tins, and placed an order for the regular supply of bread. The bread problem is one of the greatest difficulties the picker has to overcome. Unless ordered beforehand, it is all but impossible to obtain in such isolated places.

Alice fell to talking to the lady of the stores about the usual women's topics, and when we left we took with us enough tins to cook for a battalion of troops. Evening came on as we were returning, and the stars began to appear. There was hardly any traffic on the road, so we had a comfortable walk back to the huts.

" Well, we start housekeeping proper now," said Alice. " And so long as the rain and frosts keep away we shall eat well."

I silently thanked my guardian angel for leading me to one who had as great an appreciation of good food as I had myself.

" We might as well make some tea when we get back, and then jump into bed," she said. " Unless you would care to take part in the ' Harlot's Ball.' "

I told her I would be ready for bed as soon as we had had some tea, because there seemed nothing else to do. It appeared a matter of " Hobson's Choice ". When we got back the place was much quieter. The drunks were either sleeping, or had sung and danced themselves sober.

Around the hot plate several women were making tea. These hot plates were in a tumble-down shed with a corrugated iron roof. The shed was open at one end, and there were many breaks in the wall and the roof. In the driest part of the shed were two long tables with forms. The hot plates were of brick and very solidly built. Each had a huge fire-box capable of holding stout pieces of branches. On top of the fires lay great sheets of iron which were now red hot. As is usual when there is an abundance of wood, the women had kept the fires roaring all the afternoon. Tins of varying shapes and sizes were being used for boiling water or cooking food. Toffee-tin lids were being used for frying-pans, and from both hot plates came the gentle sizzling of bacon-ends, sausages and meat.

Each tin was being well watched by its owner. To lose sight of your tin even for a second or two often resulted in tragedy. Owing to the similarity of many tins certain methods were employed for marking the property. A piece of paper, rag, or string twisted round the wire handle was most general.

Alice prepared our tea, and as she was cutting the bacon and opening a tin of beans she gave me the task of watching the can of water on the hot plate. While I was thus occupied I saw how quickly two

nice pork sausages could be changed for two badly burned beef ones. An old lady was watching her tin of beef sausages, which she had marked with a match. Another woman had placed two used matches on her tin of pork sausages and, as a further precaution, had hooked a piece of paper to both matches. Suddenly the crafty owner of the " beef " made a reference to something happening at the far end of the shed. All eyes were turned sharply in that direction. With a swift movement of a fork the beef was swopped for the pork, and in a second or two the paper was set alight, igniting the fat in the tin that had held the " pork ", but which now held two black objects which could not be distinguished as beef or pork even by a regular sausage eater.

The owner of the pork sausages went into a towering rage. " What bloody varmint has been up to tricks ? " she yelled. " I'll tear the guts out of the body of him that stole my ' squealers.' " The word " him " sounded unpleasant to me, for I was the only male within yards of the hot plate. " Hey ! You ! " she yelled at me, " Where's your tin ? "

" That's the only tin I have," I told her, pointing to the can of water. Because of her rudeness I decided to keep my knowledge of the real culprit to myself.

She cast her eyes over all the tins on the hot plate. The most conspicuous object was her own pork sausages sizzling in a tin with one used match on it. She looked at the guardian of this tin, and said :

" I'm not suspicious, Maggie Paterson, but it's a long time since I see you roasting the best of meat.

I'll take the liberty of seeing how many pricks are in them skins." She stepped towards the tin.

" Leave my meat alone, you suspicious cow, or I'll stick you with this fork that I stuck those squealers with. Get out of it, you whore of a swine ! "

The women looked at each other like tigers. " And it's me what's been married for fourteen years you're calling a whore? " answered the other. " Take that, you bastard, and there's more for you if I hear another word."

Before anyone could interfere both women were on the floor, punching, scratching, kicking and swearing better than any six drunken marines. Efforts to part them were useless. As the struggle went on it seemed to me that the object of each was to see how quickly she could tear the clothes off the other. They rolled in the dust and ashes around the hot plate. They tugged at each other's hair so much that it hung limp and loose over their faces. Blood was streaming from Maggie Paterson's nose, and as she got her teeth into her opponent's cheek the blood was smeared over both their faces. Legs high in the air, the other kicked and screamed. Some of the bystanders started to quarrel whether they should try to stop them or not.

" Let 'em go to it ! " yelled one. " The whores will kill each other ! " shouted another. The arguments of the non-combatants mingled with the shrieks of the fighters, and Bedlam was let loose. Both the women were now torn bare to the waist. Maggie's skirt was hanging around her thighs. Some of the men came running into the shed and pulled the two women apart.

" What's the row between you two cows ? " one of them demanded.

" Maggie stole my meat. Them two pork squealers there," moaned Maggie's opponent.

" What pork squealers ? " came a voice from near the hot plate. " There's nothing like that here."

All eyes were turned towards the hot plate. There were no sausages there. It's an ill wind that blows nobody any good, and the fight had given somebody an extra for tea if it had done nothing else. Each of the fighters now had a group of friends around her, and the marks of battle were being removed as speedily as possible. When the excitement had died down I remembered my task. I looked for my can, but Alice had not only made the tea, but had cooked the bacon and warmed up the beans. I felt guilty, and must have shown what I felt, for Alice smiled and said :

" It's all right, Bill, I enjoyed the scrap as well. But I've seen so many it would take a good one to put me off the job in hand."

We carried our meal over to the hut. Candles were burning in glass jam jars, and a box had been provided for use as a table. As we were eating our food we could hear some of the others discussing the battle. One thing led to another, and for an hour or more anecdotes of previous fights under similar circumstances were shouted from cubicle to cubicle. It appeared that the fight I had just seen was a very mild affair, since the two antagonists were still alive, and not even the services of a doctor were necessary.

" Well, that's one way ' respectable ladies ' have of settling disputes," said Alice. " If that's the

first you have seen, believe me it won't be the last."

The thing which struck me most in the whole affair was that the woman who claimed to be respectably married was the more blackguardedly in her speech and behaviour. When I mentioned it to Alice, she said :

" Oh, she may have had a respectable marriage, but I doubt if she's kept the vows she made. It's hags like those who would talk virtuously if they knew we were not legally married. That's what comes of a cock-eyed view of the unity between two beings. These women who prate about their respectable married state would stay with their man even if they hated him. I can't think of anything more vulgar than a woman living with a man when she don't care a bit about him. Animals don't do it, and only human beings with lack of character try it. But to hell with those people. Let's talk about what we ourselves are going to do."

Since there was no further need to go out of the hut we undressed and got into bed. I had expected the sacks to be rough, but Alice was ever resourceful. She had got a piece of calico sheeting from somewhere, and had placed it inside the larger sack. The sound of talk died away, and gradually all grew quiet in the shed, save for snoring and the sound of rustling straw as others shifted in their beds.

In the stillness of the night I lay wondering how things would turn out. I had often longed for a pal, one in whom I could confide and trust. But never for a moment had I thought of a girl tramp filling that need.

I looked at Alice's features as she lay by my side.

Not a trace of cosmetics or anything artificial. She had no need to use beauty aids, because the life she led was natural. Her personality was frankness and honesty itself. She would not deceive, neither would she stand for deceit. As I looked at her in the candle light that night, I saw a girl who would be a loyal and true comrade to anyone who was loyal and true to her.

As I felt her warm body against mine and her hair on my face a sudden thought came to me. Was I being fair to her regarding the possibility of a baby coming ? I had heard vaguely that there were methods of preventing child-birth, but I had no definite knowledge of such things. I saw her eyes open, so I whispered my fears to her.

She clung close to me and whispered :

" If a baby comes, let it. We have no right to stop it. I can't use any preventives without making the sexual act an act of lust. Leave birth control methods to those who allow their bodies to be used for other ends than the right one. Parson's wives and child-less women who dictate to mothers how they ought to bring up children may think that contraception is good, but I prefer to live a natural life, and if there are any difficult consequences I'll face up to them."

I thought it over, and had finally to admit that she was right. I began to be proud of her. She was becoming more than a friend, she was being my teacher in matters of good living.

Sleep came to us both, and by six in the morning we were well rested and ready to face anything the day had to offer us. It was still dark when we rose, so we lighted our candles. From all around us came

the sounds of grumbling. Some were bemoaning the early hour, while others groaned about the state of their heads. The couple next to us were exceptionally noisy ; as they both had been drunk the day before neither of them had made provision for a light. Each was blaming the other, and they might have come to blows if Alice had not called out to them, offering a candle. I was surprised then, and have been often since, that with all the straw and wood about there were no serious fires. Yet I have never heard of a fire due to carelessness with the lighted candles.

For washing we had either to use the communal wash-tub or get some water in a pail or a large tin. Alice and I shared a pail, but when we had washed and dressed and went into the open a queer sight met our eyes. In the dim light forms could be seen moving about. Some carried lights, while others groped in the semi-darkness. Several stood bent over a tub, washing themselves. Men and women, some of them breast-bare, were bunched together. The younger women were going farther than necessary to expose their bodies, provoking the men to indecent behaviour. Their idea was to attract the younger men and get them to pal up in the orchards. If two work together the work can be made easy and reasonable pay earned, but by playing on the men's sexual desires many young women would get a man to do half her work for the doubtful privilege of enjoying her company.

The hot plates in the sheds were crowded with snuff tins, cocoa tins, toffee tins, bully-beef tins and many others of unknown origin. Each tin had its owner's eyes glued on it. One after another

all sat down to their breakfast except those who had not yet got up. Anxious eyes were turned skywards. Some feared, while others hoped, it would be too wet to work. For breakfast Alice and I had some tea, bread and butter and bacon, and while we were eating we got some water boiling for tea to drink in the orchard at lunch time. The orchards were so far away from the huts that we had to take our mid-day meal with us.

Just before seven-thirty a whistle was blown. As we were moving off towards the foreman there was a rush from the huts of those who had only just got out of bed. The foreman looked us over. I doubt if he had seen a more motley crew in all his experience. He picked out twelve of us, and told the rest to go with his assistant and pick up the windfalls. Quite often in the early morning the dew is so heavy that the trees and fruit are too wet to allow of picking. Under such circumstances the main job consists of picking up all the fruit which has been brought down by the wind or rain. Though bruised, this fruit is often put on the market for sale ; but it is quite useless for packing or storage.

Alice and I were among the twelve picked for another job. We were taken to a shed and given baskets and ladders. Then for over a mile we walked through rows of apple trees until we came to the section where we were to start picking. It is not easy to get the knack of picking fruit. Care has to be taken not to bruise the apple, or it will at once start to decay. The fruit has to be gently lifted so that the stalk snaps at the first joint. If the entire stalk is broken from the apple it will decay quickly, whereas

if the first joint of the stalk is left and the apple itself is not bruised the fruit can be stored for months without going bad.

We had to climb with a basket up the ladder, fill it with apples, then descend and carefully transfer the fruit to boxes. The boxes were collected by men with a horse and trolley and taken to the packing shed. After a couple of hours' work the foreman came round and offered piece rates for our work, but on Alice's advice we remained on day rates.

Our pay was six shillings a day for a five and a half day week. A full week would bring in thirty-three shillings, out of which health insurance was deducted. Fruit picking being classified as agricultural work, it is not subject to unemployment insurance, so no matter how many weeks you may put in at this work there is no chance of the "Dole" when the job is finished. This is one of the reasons why tramps have to walk the roads in winter. In spite of the fact that they have done quite a deal of work during the summer they get no dole, whereas the unemployed man living at home can get back into benefit after getting ten stamps upon his card.

Rarely is a full week's work done in an orchard. Picking gets held up by rain, wind, dew, or over-stocked markets. The hours are long, usually from dawn till dark. The work is monotonous unless you have an agreeable companion. For hours on end you move from tree to tree without coming in sight of either end of the row. During the first day or two you get a passion for eating fruit, but that soon wears off. The work itself becomes automatic, and it is easy to talk and pick at the same time.

During our work together Alice told me of her many experiences and how she had developed her view of life. I was greatly surprised when she told me she was deeply religious. She was not orthodox, but she held the simple faith that if we do good to-day nothing but good will follow to-morrow. She had no time for priests or parsons. She often told me she believed all religion was personal and individual. She held that there was a law of harmony which we were free to subscribe to or to oppose. If we tried to make life harmonious only peace could come of it; but it meant first of all creating harmony in our own minds by doing exactly as our conscience guided us.

She was true to her teaching all through. Quite often she would lend a helping hand to someone, and I never saw her retaliate to an act of ingratitude. I remember on one occasion a couple were feeling sick, so instead of their having a day off and losing a day's pay, Alice said she would help them as much as she could. I fell in with the idea, and we both gave some of our full boxes to these people. It only meant that Alice and I had to work a little harder. So long as an average number of boxes was sent in from each row nothing was said. In order to keep our quota up to the average throughout the day we hid several boxes in the grass around the trees which were not being picked, intending to put them out later in the day when we would be tiring. About four o'clock in the afternoon, when we were looking forward to slackening off a little, we found that these boxes had been taken, and discovered that the people we had been helping had stolen our reserve boxes to keep

up their normal quota while they rested. I was furious, but Alice only smiled and said :

" We've got nothing to be sorry for, Bill. We did what we thought was best. Because those two are unable to play the game that doesn't justify us making ourselves unhappy by causing discord."

I could hardly grasp the logic of this, until Alice explained further.

" When you agreed to do extra work what made you do it ? " she asked.

" To help those two to get a full day's work in," I replied.

" And have they done it ? " she countered.

" Why, of course," I said, mystified by her questions.

" Well," she said, " you've achieved your object. What have you got to grumble about ? I say that everybody must do what they can to help one another if they want that peace of mind which is so necessary to harmony. I can only do my best, and if others are not willing to do as much it can't be helped. It doesn't justify my creating further chaos by dropping my principles."

I had heard that there were such idealists in the world, but I had never thought I would meet one. I asked her didn't she think she was too idealistic and not sufficiently realistic, only to get another shock from her :

" Dear Bill, will you never see that the idealist *is* the realist ? Life itself would not be real without some ideal."

This made me think a lot. " Then what is your ideal, Alice ? " I asked.

" I'll tell you," she said. " I believe that we can be happy only when we get out of our lives all elements of chaos. If every man, woman, and child could be free to follow his or her conscience, then I believe all evil would be finished with. ' Conscience ' I call the Voice of God. If we obey this voice at all times we shall be at peace. It is only when we persist in doing things we know to be wrong that we become unhappy. Now I believe that as there are scientific laws, so also, is there a law of life. And that, to me, is the moral law. Don't get excited about that term. You and I are living a more moral life than most people. If we can get a grip of what life is, then we shall be able to understand the moral law. Social life is progressive. Like the animals, all human beings function organically, but surely there is something more in life than eating, drinking and sleeping.

" I live for that standard of life which will be the result of a balance between the physical, the mental, and the ethical. This balance can only come when each individual tries to adjust himself to the law of life. As an example, this morning we obeyed the call of our inner self to aid two other beings. In so far as we did it voluntarily we can expect no reward. It has nothing to do with us if those two do not subscribe to the moral law. If they did, of course they also would be doing their best to create happiness.

" Our personal happiness will come from doing what we know to be right. So my ideal in life is to do what is right and face up to the consequences. I know what is right because the voice within is never wrong."

I was beginning to understand Alice now, and the more I saw and heard her the more I wished she was typical of most women. In spite of the difference between her and the other women at the orchard she did not live an isolated life. From morning till night she had a cheery word for anyone she came into contact with, and because of this she gained a good deal of respect. She took great joy in trying to get a community life into being at the orchards. A sing-song was easy to start, but she tried harder things. For one thing, she found it difficult to get people to understand the necessity for wisely spending their wages. The first thing most pickers thought of when they drew their money was a bottle of beer or some methylated spirits. And once they started on that stuff there was no stopping until all the money was gone. Drunken and stupefied, they would crawl back to the huts only to face another week's work with no supply of food. In order to carry on they would have to " sub " out of their next week's wages and buy at the village stores. This meant that they had to pay at least thirty per cent. more for their food than if they bought a week's supply from town. Alice used to talk to them quietly and encourage them to buy their food first, and to have a drink if they had any money left.

These talks had amusing results. On one occasion the couple next to us decided to take her advice and shop before they drank. This was a great joy to Alice, and we went with them to help. It was a red letter day for the woman. She told us it was the first time since she had been a picker that she could say she had a week's supply of food in one

parcel. She thanked Alice for her advice, and promised not to get drunk, but to go back to the huts with the parcel. We left them in high spirits, and after doing our own shopping we went to the pictures. About eleven that night we saw our two neighbours being taken along the street by two policemen. They had gone for a drink, the craze had got them, and in order to obtain more money they had tried to auction their stores to passers-by.

Alice was not perturbed at all. She asked the police to let them go and she would take them home. But our two friends were known to the police, and they were taken off to the " lock-up ".

Afterwards I asked Alice if she thought they were worth bothering about. She gave me one of her pleasant smiles and said :

" Of course they are. Everybody is."

Sunday is a day of rest, but a tramp can find plenty to do even on that day. As there is no work in the orchards, the pickers turn their attention to such things as washing and mending clothes, and shaving.

Many humorous situations arise from men letting their beards grow for a week, then shaving them off. You often have to look twice at a man before recognizing him. One Sunday morning an old man who had not used a razor for months thought he would shave off his beard so as to give his " wife " a surprise. The first I heard of it was when a shrill female voice yelled out : " Get to hell out of here while I'm in kip." On investigating I found that she could not recognize the man she had been living with for the past week. Even some of the neighbours would not

believe he was the man he claimed to be until they had searched the camp. After a great deal of explanation he was allowed to enter his own hut, and I have no doubt that his " bride " was only too pleased to receive him in his new condition.

Cooking Sunday's dinner is an elaborate job if you have got anything to cook. Alice saw to it that we would have a good cooked meal on this day.

" You've got a ' joint ' occupation this morning, Bill," she said, as she unwrapped a joint of beef. " And see that you don't spoil it."

I was glad to have something to do, but found that my job would not be too strenuous. I was to hang the meat on the hooked end of an iron rod, the other end of which was attached to a swivel above the fire. On the ground directly under the meat was a tin to catch the dripping from the joint. I had to watch to see that the meat did not burn, and baste it at times with the dripping from the tin.

I was an early starter, but before long there were nine joints of various kinds and sizes roasting before the fire. Those watching the meat perched themselves on a plank set on the logs in front of the fire. The man next to me sat intently watching a piece of meat hardly larger than a fair-sized chop. Many remarks were passed about his joint: someone referred to an alleged outbreak of cattle stealing, while two others hotly discussed whether it was a cow or a bull. Another asked him if he would sell half the dripping he had out of it. The old man heard these remarks, but showed no sign that he was hurt. His patience made me think well of him. It is bad enough at any time to be short of food,

but to have the fact rubbed in in this manner must have been torture.

I wanted to do something about it, but I did not know what I could do without making him more uncomfortable. I looked round and saw Alice standing behind me, so I got up and told her all about it.

" Get him to have dinner with us," she said. " The poor devil looks lonely."

I slipped back to my seat and whispered the invitation. His face lit up, and after a little persuasion he accepted.

While I was watching the meat Alice cooked some potatoes and vegetables and got dinner all ready. We carried our food to the hut and sat down to our meal.

" Do you like plenty, Dad ? " Alice asked of the old man.

" Sure, lass. A good plateful will do me good," he replied, and, with a glance at the food, he said appreciatively : " You two sure like your vittles."

" If we don't look after ourselves who else will ?" asked Alice. We each tackled a piled plate. The old man talked little, and then only to pass some comment on the tasty dinner. His desire to be silent fascinated me ; I felt sure he had a lot to say if he would only let himself go, and I tried to get him to talk.

" Those boys gave you a chipping this morning," I remarked.

" Oh, aye," he said. " Them that have plenty think it fun to laugh at those with little. You can't blame them, though. It's the same with most

people. The greatest joy comes from another's misfortune. Did you ever hear people in a motor shriek with laughter because their driver came close to you and splashed you with mud or made you jump to the bank? If a man falls from an apple tree do people see if he is hurt, or do they laugh as if it were the greatest joke on earth?"

"You're right there, dad," said Alice. "But let's stop talking and get this dinner eaten up. You've got another plateful to get down you yet."

"I'll not say no," said the old man. "It's some days now since I had a good meal. You can't live for ever on apples, though they do help a bit if you've got nothing else."

We all had another helping, and by the time we were finished there was little left. I was about to go and get some hot water for washing when a strange face popped into the doorway. It was strange in two senses. To begin with I had never seen it before, and secondly it was very long and ugly. The nose was sharp and pointed, the lips thin and compressed. The eyes bulged out and the ears projected from the face. The hair was drawn tightly back over the head. She gave a sniff and handed in some tracts.

"We've just called round from the mission to see if we can help any of you poor people," she said in a high-pitched voice.

"Certainly you can," said Alice. "We're just going to wash up, so if you care to help you may."

The old man burst out laughing. The "mission lady" glared at Alice. "We have come to offer you life," she said. "You are poor sinners bound for Hell, and we have come to save you."

"Well, get on with your job," said Alice, "and let us get on with ours."

From outside came the sounds of a harmonium and some singing. I went for some hot water, and saw that a group of "missionaries" had confiscated all the forms and set them in rows under the cooking shed. Although there were plenty of pickers by the fire no one as yet had made a move towards the seats. They were grumbling among themselves about what they called "taking liberties", but nobody offered any practical suggestion for dealing with the problem. Many of the women claimed to be Catholics and voiced their disapproval at being disturbed by Protestant infidels. It was amusing to hear these women claim allegiance to any Church, for by their actions during the week one would have judged that they had never heard of such an institution.

The missionaries wailed out their message in song and loud speech, but still none of the pickers showed any interest, beyond complaining that their seats had been taken from them. The old man went out for some more water to help me wash up. He was greeted with one or two jibes and was even invited to "join the choir". He looked at his taunters steadily and said:

"Get your joke over, boys. If you haven't the guts to go and take your seats you don't deserve them."

He and I went back to the hut and washed up. After a time the old man looked out again, and saw the crowd still standing while the "missionaries" sang and shouted to empty seats. He looked at Alice and said:

" Are you coming to sit by the fire, lass ? 'cause if you are I'll go for a seat."

" I'll get one as well," said Alice.

All three of us went across to the forms. As we approached one of the ladies thought that at last they were to have a congregation, and shouted for joy. To her surprise, instead of sitting down we took hold of one of the forms and carried it to the fire. The singing stopped, and one of the male missionaries rushed to recapture the form.

" We're holding a service," he shouted, " and we want that seat."

" We've done a week's hard work," retorted Alice, " and we want this seat."

Some of the pickers looked on in amazement, but, encouraged by this example, others went and brought back a form. In a few seconds all the forms were around the fire and the pickers seated. One of the missionary women went hysterical and called down curses upon us all.

" You are all of the devil," she shrieked, " and you shall be damned."

She began to shout texts and quotations, while the rest of her gang told us how bad we were. I felt like telling them that at heart the people here were as good as they, if not better, but was prevented by the old man, who started singing " Abide with Me ". Before he had got through the first verse several of the tramps had joined in.

Whether they meant what they sang, or only wanted to express their feelings it is hard to say. But the singing had its effect upon the missionaries. They did not join in, but their shouting ceased. As

the strains of the last verse died away the old man called out : " Let's have another one ! " There was a general call for " Rock of Ages ".

For over an hour the old man led the community singing. From the hymns we changed to old-time songs, and soon some were asking the privilege of a solo. I had seen nothing like this before. I was not deceived into believing that a revivalist spirit had come over the camp, but it was very clear that these human derelicts had the spark of fraternity in them, and could be happy once it was given fuel to feed on. After the singing, when everybody was thinking of tea, Alice suggested a tea party around the fire. There were no dissentients, and it was agreed that all who could should put some dry tea into a large pot and so make enough for all. All the camp enjoyed tea together, and we spent a happy time. Until late in the evening we sat and talked and sang, and when we broke up the party there were some still asking the universal question :

" Have you heard this one ? "

During the evening one man described how he was caught poaching in a wood. The policeman must have been new to his job, for as he was taking him away the tramp asked him to let him go back for his " drum ". The policeman thought the man was planning escape, so he said : " Oh no ; my lad ; you don't get away as easy as that. You stay here. I'll get your drum."

There was another story told of how the residents of a certain district often complained to the police about the persistent begging of tramps. The local inspector told the constable on that beat to keep an

eye open. When the policeman was out on duty that day he saw a tramp coming from a back door with a can of tea and a sandwich. He went up to the tramp and said : " How did you get this food ? " " I just gagged it," the tramp replied. " Oh ! Lucky for you you didn't ' beg ' it," said the policeman, and let the tramp go. When he returned to the police station the inspector was waiting for him to tell him of further complaints. " Oh no, sir," he said. " No one was begging, but I did see a man ' gagging.' " " You damned fool ! " said the inspector. " Begging, gagging, telling-the-tale or pitching the fork, it's all the same. The best thing you can do is to challenge anyone you see with a bag on his back." Next day the constable brought in a man with a bag on his back. It was the local postman. " What are you charging him with ? " asked the inspector. " Begging," said the constable. " But I wasn't begging," shouted the postman. " No," grinned the policeman. " You called it delivering, but it's all the same."

When apple picking is finished it is getting well into winter. It was a cold November day when we left Wisbech by bus for Cambridge. We had over five pounds between us, and our intention was to make London for Christmas. We spent two days in Cambridge and collected another pound by " chanting " the streets. From Cambridge we made our way through Royston, Hitchin, Luton and St. Albans to London.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE day we travelled from St. Albans to London it was cold and wet. We had taken shelter often, and by the time we reached Highgate it was past midnight. We had money for a bed, but neither of us knew of a place where we could be sure to find a clean bed. It may appear strange to some people that tramps quite often face the night on the streets with money in their pockets, rather than go to a common lodging-house, but it is so. The chief reasons for this are that the beds are unclean and verminous, and in most of them you cannot sleep for noise.

Alice told me that close to Highgate there is a hostel for " fallen girls ". She told me of the plight of a young Welsh girl who had fallen upon hard times, but had led a clean life. She found herself without shelter one night, and a policeman directed her to this hostel. Because she could not say that she had " fallen " she was refused admission. The girl was heartbroken, and for the moment lost her balance. In bitter despair, she went and talked to the first man she saw. Two hours later she knocked at the hostel door again. When the door was opened she said : " It's all right now. I've fallen."

Crossing London at night is an experience in itself. One moment the streets appear deserted, then suddenly there are bursts of life. Lorries laden

with market produce, all-night trams, returning taxi-cabs all help to remind one that London is not dead, but only resting. Every half-mile or so a tramp can be seen shuffling along aimlessly, hoping that daylight will come soon. As you get nearer the centre more life is to be seen. The markets are busy at Billingsgate and Covent Garden, " Fleet Street " is just closing down, and at four o'clock the early morning coffee shops begin their day's trade. These shops are a boon to the tramp who keeps himself fairly clean. From three to five are the coldest hours of the night, and much suffering through cold can be avoided if you can buy a mug of tea. One shop very popular among tramps is in St. Martin's Lane. It is used by those who stay in Trafalgar Square at night, and by some who come out of St. Martin's Crypt.

You are not allowed to sleep in this shop, and if any do doze off the waiter comes among the tables making a noise that would put " John Peel " in the shade.

The night Alice and I arrived in London we went to this shop and had a meal. We arrived just before four, but a few tramps were already waiting for it to open. We sat there until half-past seven, when we made our way to Bayswater. We intended to sing from eight-thirty till ten before making plans for shelter. We started off at the back of Queen's Road, and were doing well, for the first half-hour brought us six shillings. But then we came across a " crow ".

A " crow " is a man employed by a gang of street singers to protect the territory in which they sing. His duty is to warn off anyone else who might stray

into the area marked out by the gang. If you are not willing to leave when told to, a signal is given and other " crows " come and, if necessary, use physical force. Some " gangs " or " choirs " have as many as eight " crows " and pay them each five shillings a day. The " crow " we met told us that if we wanted no trouble we would go beyond Praed Street before we started again.

Neither Alice nor I felt like giving in, so we told him he could go to hell. He was " crowing " to a gang of alleged " Unemployed Miners ", and a whistle from him brought up several ruffianly looking men. We were told to " hop it " while we had the chance. But we both decided to call their bluff, so we started to sing again. We might have been roughly handled that morning, if a policeman had not appeared at the corner of the street. We sang on unmolested for a while, until another man came up to us.

" How much will you take to quit ? " he asked.

" How much do you offer ? " asked Alice.

" Ten bob between you," replied the man.

" All right," said Alice, " cash down ! " And she was handed four half-crowns.

" If you happen to be in the Café in Seymour Place at three this afternoon I'd like to talk to you two," he said as he went off.

As Alice watched the man go she remarked :

" Chanting must be good in this district if they can afford to buy off opposition."

I was surprised that anyone would pay us ten shillings not to work the district, but I had not got the knowledge that I have now.

" We'll see him at three," said Alice. " He may be of use to us for a week or two."

We crossed the Bayswater Road into Hyde Park. It was just after nine o'clock, and a rank of tramps was forming up outside the Tyburn Convent, where men and women who had spent the night out would get some tea and food at nine-thirty. Some of the younger ones were fairly clean, but most of them were old and dirty. Many of them I later knew as " Jake Wallers " : tramps who had given way to the " Meth " craze and were in a perpetual state of stupefaction. If they could not get a supply of " Jake " in the raw they would resort to anything containing alcohol. I have seen women put boot polish into water and suck the liquid through a piece of gauze. There is also a preparation that motorists on tour use for boiling water. It is a kind of alcoholic wax which, when dissolved in water, will make a person drunk. You can smell a " Jake Waller " many yards off, and as we sat in the park that morning it was revolting to see and smell these people going to the Convent for food. As each received a parcel from the Sister they crossed into the park to eat it.

Two young lads who could not have been more than eighteen years of age came to the seat on which Alice and I were sitting. We got talking, and learned that they had been " on the floor " for six months, and were proud of the fact that they had " slept out " for the past four weeks. This meant that for that time neither of them had taken off his clothes or had a bath. They had travelled from convent to convent, and slept in the Mall or on the Embankment at night.

We asked if they would like a real feed, and took them off to a coffee shop. They were hungry, but neither of them seemed to care about their condition. They had completely adapted themselves to a life of begging from convents, and appeared to like it. I was yet to learn that these were only two of the vast army of human derelicts that has been built up by the accursed charity organizations of London.

At three o'clock in the afternoon we searched out the café in Seymour Place. It was packed with men and women speaking the dialects of probably every county in Britain. The man who gave us the ten shillings was seated by the door. He beckoned us over to him.

" I'm glad you've come," he said. " I want to have a chat with you. When you're ready we'll go outside." We had not had dinner, so we ate a meal, then went with him into the street.

" Are you staying in London long ? " he asked.

" For a bit," replied Alice.

" Well, how about joining the gang ? You can pick your field and we can give you crows. All it'll cost you is your rent and ten per cent. on the week."

In plain terms, in return for ten per cent. of our takings and the rent of a room in a house of which he was landlord, he would give us protection in any area we chose.

We agreed upon a week's trial, and the three of us went to his house. It was a large ten-roomed house, and some of the gang lived in it. Our landlord was known as " Tim Sullivan ", but I never found out whether that was his right name, or whether he had ever seen the sky over Ireland.

" Tim " appeared to specialize in match-sellers or " Timber Merchants ", and street singers. He organized " Unemployed Miners' Choirs " of men who had never been down a pit, and " Ex-service men Songsters " of men who might never have served anything. All that was needed was a good voice and willingness to walk in the gutter.

Match-selling is a skilled occupation, for it calls for great patience and the ability to maintain a pity-winning expression. Some try on their own for an hour or two at a time, but the most successful are those who have had a series of lessons from " Tim ".

I could never adapt myself to match-selling, but I know it to be a most lucrative business. The West-end pitches are worth from five shillings to fifteen shillings per hour, while other main road stands are worth two-and-six to five shillings per hour.

Tim wanted Alice to sing with a gang, while I acted as a " crow ", but we would not agree to this. We chose our own pitches and were supplied with two " crows ", who protected the pitch for us and kept an eye upon average takings for Tim. There was no way of making certain how much we collected, but since we had no desire to cheat there was no quarrel over our returns. The value of protection was soon apparent. At places where we would have been delighted to reach five shillings we made over a pound in two hours. As no one had been round singing before us we received from all the benevolent, whereas if it had been a " free pitch " the money would have been divided among many.

Street singing in London is the best paid game, but it is hard work. One sees very little of the

human side of life. Eventually it resolves itself into a daily round of collecting pennies, shillings, and sometimes half-crowns or a " bit of paper ". The " chanter " in London hardly ever makes personal contact with his benefactors. In the country you are asked in for a cup of tea and something to eat, and many a half-hour is spent in convivial surroundings. Children in the country are far more friendly to the singers than is the London child. In London the children are apt to shout after, or even throw things at a singer, but although it likes its joke the country child would run a mile to get a penny from its parents to give to the tramp.

The best distinction I can think of is that in the country a street singer is part of the social life, and in London he is only another expression of the great " charity racket ".

Although most of the street " gaggers " in London are organized, there is a deplorable lack of comradely spirit among them. At the house where we stayed there were about forty people, and most of them were rowing among themselves from the moment they came off the streets. We stayed here for two weeks, and I was glad when one day Alice and I agreed to make the road again. We decided to get out of London for Christmas, for we realized that at such times there would be many rows among the gangs over the question of territory.

We took what is known as the " bottom road ", in other words, we made straight for the south coast, then followed it to the west. The advantage of this route in November and December is that by this time most of the tramps have made for more

sheltered districts. Because of the milder climate Devon and Cornwall are happy hunting grounds for many of them. Where crowds gather, however, it is harder to live, so if the less frequented paths are taken the reward comes in a better and easier way of life.

Singing is hard going during these months, so you have to do lots of " gagging " in order to keep body and mind in trim. Croydon was the last we saw of London, and by way of Reigate and Cuckfield we made Brighton. The only good thing for tramps in Brighton is the " spike ". It stands on the top of Race Hill, and can only be reached after a long walk up this famous hill. Brighton " spike " is well known for its " cock-broth ". Instead of tea, skilly or cocoa, this spike gave a bowl of soup which was known as " cock-broth ". It was so good that tramps on the south coast would make a point of calling for the sake of the stew. This spike was also one of the few places on this coast which provided a bed and a clean bath. Extra large crowds gather here at race times, for there are many shillings to be earned watching cars, helping bookmakers to pitch, selling race-cards or tips. I soon learned from Alice that " lady punters " have great faith in tips from tramps. It is true that many sporting gents give a tramp half-a-crown and tell him to back a certain horse, and it is always assumed that when you're willing to whisper a horse's name the information has been obtained in this way.

In Brighton one August we bought a penny note-book and wrote a horse's name on each page. We went to the course, and by telling the story that we

had slept on the Downs that night and had seen the " performance " of certain horses at dawn, and had overheard the conversation of some stable boys, and so were able to impart good " information ", we sold every leaf at twopence a time. There were other tipsters there selling tips at a shilling and two-and-six, and telling the most elaborate stories, but I doubt if they made much more than we did. The amazing thing was that the horse we tipped won the race. Lucky backers pressed us for more information, and Alice sent me off for more books while she kept them in suspense waiting for the tip. Unfortunately, neither of us knew the name of any of the horses running in any of the following races, so Alice bought a paper and we got away from the crowd.

" If the fools want to buy paper at twopence a page they can," she said. " You pick one this time." She handed me the paper.

I knew nothing of any of the horses, so I chose one blindly.

" That's as good as any other," she said, " a nice short name, so it won't take long to write it down."

We went back to the rails. Immediately a man came up and asked if we had anything else like the last one. " Sure," said Alice. " But we can't tell it yet because if a lot of money goes on quick it will be known that we've betrayed the trust of a good friend."

This excuse did not fit in with the story that had sold the first " tip ", but the man did not notice that. " Give us a chance," he urged. " I won't spill the beans. Here's two-and-six for it."

Alice took out a book and wrote the horse's name

down. " Here you are, then," she said. " But keep it dark."

Others had been watching, and at once came over. The price was fixed at twopence and we were mobbed for tips. Fortunately we sold out before the race started, and were in the centre of Brighton before it finished. My choice was last, so I doubt if we could have sold any more tips at that meeting.

Another gag she taught me for race meetings was the best I have ever heard. The four best chances indicated by the papers were used as tips. We would sell fifty of each by dividing forces, each working one side of the course for fifteen minutes and then crossing over, so that at the end of half an hour we had both distributed one tip on either side of the course. It is almost certain that one of the tips will win or get placed, and the one who sold the winning tip would return to that part of the course where it was sold and sell another on the strength of the win.

Race meetings are very scarce, so you have to make the most of them while they are on, keeping some of the proceeds for a rainy day.

A tramp has few ways of getting money in November or early December, so he has to use many of the " marks ". A " mark " is one who has become known to tramps as certain for a shilling or two in return for a good story. Just outside Brighton on the road to Steyning there is an old lady who is " good " for two-and-six if you ask for work. It is generally known that she has no work to provide, so an easy half-crown can be picked up. This old lady makes out that she has lots of work to be done, but only those not in the know take alarm.

Once you have expressed willingness to do all the work of the house, clean up the garden, chop wood and other odd jobs, she will pretend to reflect, and say :

" Well, after all I won't have anything done to-day. But here is two-and-six to help you on your way."

Another easy " mark " in the district is a parson who has a heavy garden roller. Most new tramps shy at this, and get nothing, but the more experienced know that any attempt to shift the roller is worth a shilling. I have seen this roller several times, but have never seen it moved more than a yard.

Many retired Army Officers are good " marks " if only you can talk consistently about the regiment in which they served, or respond to some army command as a good soldier should. One day a group of six tramps travelling together decided to call on a " mark " who had been Colonel of an Irish regiment.

" Ex-service men looking for work, eh ? " he said, in reply to an appeal by the spokesman. " Well, let's see what you know about the army." He eyed them over and called out : " Shun." The tramps sprang to attention. " By the right, quick march." Off went the tramps in fine style, each man doing his best to impress the Colonel. Up and down the drive they were marched until they were getting a little tired. As they approached the house again hopes were raised that this time they would halt at the kitchen door ; instead, the order " About turn " was given again. This command was followed by " Double ". Down the drive they " doubled ". As they reached the roadway they turned their heads,

expecting the order "About turn". Instead of which the Colonel shouted: "Keep going! I'll shut the gate."

Of all the places of call I prefer the people of humble circumstances, who enjoy a talk with a tramp as others might enjoy a lecture on travel by an explorer. A quiet hour or two by the fire and a cup of tea are more valuable than any of the money obtained without personal contact. The fact that Alice and I were together caused us to be treated better than many who travelled alone. Not only were we helped, but many a time we were able to give help to others when it was sorely needed. To cut some wood or wash a floor was a simple task. But one day Alice was asked to do something more unusual. We were travelling in lonely country, and called at a house for some hot water to make tea. The woman at the house was obviously ill. She invited us in, and while the water was boiling she and Alice talked in whispers at the other end of the room. Finally they told me to watch the kettle, and went into another room. The water was boiling long before Alice returned. When she did I noticed a queer look in her eyes.

"Do you think we could rest a few days around here, Bill?" she asked. "We can be of great use to the lady here, because she is in great difficulty."

"O.K. with me," I said. "But what's the matter?"

She looked quickly at the door, and said:

"She's going to have a baby to-night."

It was some time before I realized the seriousness of the situation. Here was a woman who, because

of her poverty, was to go through such trouble relying only upon what help might be offered her by neighbours. We had a few days' stores with us, so the food problem was easily solved, and all we had to do was to make a bed in the kitchen for ourselves. In the evening a friendly woman came from one of the cottages about a mile off, and between them it was arranged that Alice should sit up at night while this woman would relieve her during the day. There was little for me to do beyond keep the fire going and wash up, but I was very pleased that we could be of some service to this stranger. As the result of those few days' help we made a friend for life, and we got a welcome there every time we passed that way.

The south coast can be brutally cold in winter time, and then tramps are driven to such places as the New Forest. Here you can shelter for a week or so, provided you are not found by the "Rangers". If you have a supply of sacks a bed can be made of dead fern leaves, which are plentiful in this forest. By choosing a clump of thick bush or gorse a hide-out can be maintained for several days. The greatest difficulty is that of fires. They are not only dangerous but also attract attention. Alice and I made camp there for a week before being found out. We had gone off the main road at Lyndhurst, and struck through to the middle of the forest. We chose a spot several miles from any houses, and cleared a patch from all grass and weeds to prevent fire from spreading. On fine days we sang the small communities around, and when it was cold we peddled "Funkum".

This is the tramps' name for lavender. There is an interesting legal point regarding the sale of lavender. Provided it is sold in an open packet it is considered " perishable ", so no licence is required in order to sell it. A box of lavender is an open passport to any door, and prevents any charge of begging. With " funkum " and " chanting " we had all the food we required, but the rain and wind provided all the difficulties we could tackle. Our camp was in the middle of a thick clump of bush. We were safe enough unless the rain came straight down. One night we were in bed and asleep when a storm started. It thundered and lightened for a while, then we had a deluge of water come down upon us. The bags of fern leaves became sodden and heavy. There was no shelter for miles, so we could do no better than stay where we were. The storm was so heavy that we were sure it would cease as suddenly as it had started, but we were to go through more than we anticipated.

Water was gathering in small pools around us. We had to place the bags of fern leaves under us, so we lost what little shelter we had. Our clothes were wet through and clinging to the skin.

" This is one of the joys of a vagrant's life," said Alice. " I'd just like to have some of those social workers here now. It would be good to see how they took to it after declaring that tramps would sooner wander about than have a home life."

I was glad that she was able to face up to it so well, for it would have been hard on me if I had had to comfort and look after her. " It ain't goin' to rain no more no more," she sang, as she emptied a

sack of its leaves and drew it around her shoulders. " It's no use for keeping out the wet, but we might keep a little warm if the wind drops."

After you get used to the uncomfortable conditions a storm reveals nature in its magnificent forms. The roar of thunder in the heavens and the flashes of light make one wonder if, after all, man does matter much in this world. The rabbits, rats, moles and foxes all had shelter that night. Only human beings could be found with no one to care for them and nowhere to go. For hours we waited for the storm to pass. The scene was such that speech was out of the question. We could only huddle close to each other and think. As the rain ceased and the sky cleared we saw the dawn of a new day.

A sunrise is a splendid sight at any time, but after a night of storm it is magnificent.

As daylight came we looked around us. As far as we could see there was no house or shelter where we could go. The main job on hand was to get some breakfast and try to dry our clothes. A fire was impossible, as there would be no dry wood or leaves until the wind and what little sun there was had done their work. We made our way towards the roadway, hoping to see a house or barn where we could get help to dry our clothes. We tried a house, but in spite of our condition were refused the shelter of a barn at the rear.

" There's the workhouse for you. Why don't you use it ? " said the lady of the house. " You have no right to sleep out, so you must put up with the consequences."

Her spirit was typical of Hampshire people, as we found out afterwards.

We went on looking for some shelter. None was in sight, but to our joy we found some stakes piled in bundles. " If we could only get some kindling we might make a fire," I suggested. But as I spoke I realized how little chance there was of finding any small dry wood. At last we were driven to shaving a stake with a knife. It was a slow job, but I did get enough small kindling for our purpose. We dragged some stakes away from the rest and made a fire. With much blowing and nursing we managed to get it started, and by putting plenty of wood on we were able to dry more stakes so that they would burn. When the fire was well going we thought about drying our clothes. We had none to spare, so we had to dry a few at a time.

" Start at the bottom first," said Alice as she peeled off her top clothes. With the aid of sacks and a top coat she was able to discard most of her underwear and arrange it before the fire. We cooked breakfast, and were eating it when we were disturbed by two " Forest Officials ".

" Who lit that fire ? " said one of them, " and what wood are you burning ? "

It was obvious what wood we were burning, and it must have been one of us two who had lit the fire. I was in no mood for arguing with the men, but Alice took them in hand.

" Well, we've got the fire," she said, " and it will remain alight until our clothes are dry. Then we'll put it out."

" Don't you realize the danger of fires in the forest ? " they asked.

" Oh yes," laughed Alice. " On a dry day there

is great danger ; but do you think there is any fear now ? "

" Well, I think you'll have to come with us," one of them said.

" Not like this, surely ? " said Alice. " You must retire until I get dressed ; there are my clothes drying."

It was an embarrassing moment for the two men. To leave us meant that we would have the chance to get away, and to stay would be indecent.

" We shall be back in half an hour," they told us. " And then if you're still here you're for it."

They went away, and we piled on more wood and soon had our clothes dry. We were more than half an hour, but we saw that the fire was out before we left. As we made the main road, we saw the two men coming across the open. They did not follow us, but went to see that the fire was out and returned the way they had come.

" They are two in a million," said Alice. " I thought we were set for a month's holiday."

We went on through Lyndhurst to Christchurch. All tramps go through Hampshire as speedily as possible. I am sure that if detailed records are kept they would show that Hampshire is one of the counties with the worst records for having tramps arrested for petty offences.

As we got into Devon and Cornwall we entered the area known to tramps as " Winter Headquarters ". The people in these two counties are more human and understanding than those of Hampshire. Because of this many of the " famous " tramps congregate here. Like the " Gentleman Beggars "

who fill the charity homes of London, there are tramps in these two counties who, according to their own stories, have been " aristocrats ", " moneyed men " and men of real standing. One outstanding man of this type is the " Devon Duke ". He always tells a stranger that he really should be living in a mansion, but he never mentions which mansion. The title he claims certainly sounds good, but cannot be found in any of the books of reference. When this fact is pointed out to him, he always says it is only evidence that " they " are doing all they can to do him out of his rightful heritage.

I had heard a lot about the " Duke " before I met him, but no account of him had done him justice. It was on Dartmoor between Okehampton and Tavistock that I first came across him. He was of slight build, about five feet six, and had long, black, wavy hair which, at the time, was hanging over his collar. His features were sharp, and his face always wore an expression of complete boredom. He was never known to carry a " drum " or even to beg, although his own accounts of his hard luck and good fortune at begging were inspiring. Various conditions had great effect upon his stories. If he was hungry and met anyone with tea or food to spare he would trot out a tale of bad luck and say he could not " touch " anything that day. But after he had been given refreshment he would lie back and recount how lucky he is at times, and what glorious " hand-outs " he has had. He never forgot to point out that his great success was due to some dynamic power which he called " personality ".

One of his successes was his mastery of the

" college accent ", except when he grew excited, when he fell back into gutter speech. He looked up as we approached him that day on the moor.

" How do you do, friends ? " he said, in a cultured voice. " I hope you've had better luck than I have to-day."

" Not too bad," said Alice. " There seems to be plenty for the asking around here."

The " Duke " gave us an anguished look. " Dear me," he whined, " I had the most atrocious deal served out to me to-day. I did two hours' work, and all I received was a sandwich. Of course one of my station in life cannot argue with my inferiors, or else I should have demanded more." He glanced at my haversack and added : " I say, friend, would you make some tea ? I have left my kit at the gate of a house I called at. It is so annoying to find one has lost one's stores."

He was bearing out his reputation, but we thought it cheap entertainment to give him some tea. Alice started " pulling his leg " by asking him first for some paper and then a match, but the " Duke " had nothing ; he was really destitute. He revealed no sense of shame at being found without the essentials of a tramp's kit, and showed no enthusiasm to offer to help us light the fire.

" Do you travel this county ? " he asked.

" We travel them all," said Alice. " There's nothing like knowing the land you live in. Do you work this county always ? "

" I'm staying this way until I get well," he replied. " With all the trouble of my estate and the bother with the lawyers it has made me quite ill." He

passed his hand over his forehead and put on a look which cried out for sympathy. We did not stop him, so he rambled on, telling us how rich he would be as soon as his estate was settled, and what he was going to do for tramps when he had full control of his fortune. Apparently his ideas had not gone beyond bigger and better casual wards.

When the tea was made he remembered that he had lost his cup with his kit. All I could lend him was a milk tin which was nearly empty. He kicked at first, but when Alice remarked that she was very thirsty and made a grab at the drum the " Duke " decided to sink to the low level of drinking out of a milk tin. I feel sure that he considered his social position demanded that I should have given him my cup and taken the tin myself, but my biased proletarian outlook would not permit of that. He drank his tea, then started to tell us what splendid tea he had begged a day or two before. It appeared that most villagers knew of his coming and competed with one another in supplying him with the best of everything. I asked him where he was sleeping that night, and he said that if he could beg three-and-sixpence he would stay at an inn.

" We're going to the spike," said Alice. " Do you know what part of the town it's in ? "

" I don't know exactly," he replied reflectively. " Of course I have met many of the boys coming from and going to it, but I don't use the place myself."

When he had to use the spike that night because of his " hard luck " at begging I heard the porter say to him :

" This is the third time this month. Why don't you take a walk out of the county ? "

The " Duke " saw me smiling and blushed vividly. There was good company in the spike that night. Besides the " Devon Duke " there were the " Falmouth Sailor " and the " Talking Fish ". The " Falmouth Sailor " was a " meth " fiend and had lost a leg years before, so it was assumed that he had been to sea. The " Talking Fish " had almost solved the problem of perpetual motion. Whether awake or asleep he talked, talked and talked. He addressed no one in particular, and had little consideration for the topic he was dealing with. I was next to him in the bathroom. As he was undressing he was telling the world what he thought of the magistrate who had given him seven days for begging twenty years ago. By the time he was in the bath he was telling all who cared to listen of his life at school. He did not stop talking even at meals. During sleep he still mumbled out his complaints against society at large.

At this casual ward there is a room which holds ten men. I am far from convinced that it was an accident that these three " celebrities " were placed together. It was a sight to remember. The " Duke " was seeking sympathy because of his " terrific " bad luck. " Talking Fish " was galloping along his path of life, revealing the most intimate details, while poor " Falmouth Sailor " wanted all to hear of his exploits with police, parsons and pubs.

The last I heard of the " Duke " his estate was no nearer settlement, while " Falmouth Sailor " and

" Talking Fish " had gone to prison together for three months for rioting in a casual ward.

I have often wondered how the warders got the silence rule operating with the " Talking Fish ".

In this part of the country the children are not afraid of tramps. One day a group of us were sitting at the side of the road having a meal as children were going to school. Many gave a cheery shout as they passed, but two or three stopped to talk. The eldest carried on the conversation.

" You like tramping, don't you, mister ? " he said, and a tramp replied :

" Sure, son."

" You like black cans of tea, don't you, mister ? "

" Sure, son."

" You like sleeping in hayricks, don't you, mister ? "

" You bet we do," was the reply.

The school bell was ringing. As the boys moved off at a trot they shouted back :

" But you don't like work, do you, mister ? "

Devon and Cornwall are two counties noted for " skippers ". A " skipper " is a place where you shelter for the night without permission. It may be a shed at a quarry, or a barn or cowshed. A wood or a cave provides good shelter, and so does a brick-yard. Owing to the mild winters in this part of the country many " skippers " are in use all the year round. On the road from Tavistock to Plymouth there is an old " tip " or dumping-ground, where there are several caves cut into the earth. It is an ideal camping ground, because there is no danger of fires causing damage. It is used by tramps as a

turning-point in the West Country, for very few carry on farther west unless they are staying in the county. After doing the south coast one can turn north to Wales, or strike north-east and make the Midlands. At one time this camp was kept clean, but since the advent of the " Jake Waller " it has become worse than a London lodging house.

On the night we arrived it was too dark to pick our place, so we sat down in the first dry corner we could find. We were encouraged on being informed that the police had been the day before, for we knew we were safe from them for a few days. We made a hot drink and wrapped ourselves around with sacks. The regular tramps always leave sacks for those who come after, and it is the rule that all tins shall be left clean or taken away and destroyed. At this camp life started as early as six a.m., because of its distance from Plymouth. The return journey was about fifteen miles, so if you wanted to " gag " Plymouth and be back before dark you had to make an early start.

We had arrived prepared for a stay of two days, so we did not stir so early as the others. When we did rise the camp was nearly empty. A fire was burning, and a boy and a girl were bringing more fuel. These two were the children of a woman tramp, known as " Peggy " because she got her living making and selling clothes-pegs. It was a rule that any who used the camp should share food with her and her children in return for the fuel they gathered. " Peggy " would go to town twice a week to sell her pegs, and if she did not spend her takings on " Scrumpy " she might bring some food home

herself. " Scrumpy " in Devon is almost as bad as " Jake ". It is a cheap cider, and when you get drunk on it you are sick for a day or two after.

" Peggy " looked up from her peg-making as we went to the fire. " How do ? " she called out. " I heard you last night and thought you to be strangers. Which way are you going ? "

" Making north," I said, " after a few days round here."

She spat across to a rubbish heap and remarked :

" Too bloody cold to be shifting north yet awhile. They ain't put the peas in yet, and they won't want me while picking time. You stay here awhile, where the wind don't blow so hard."

If she was going to stay there while picking time she would be there for some months. But Alice and I had no intention of staying all that time, for we had other plans. While we were cooking breakfast we chatted to the children. It was easy to see that they were " Peggy's " offspring. They had chubby, rosy cheeks, black hair, and were heavily built without being fat. " Peggy " claimed that they were over fourteen, but I doubt if either of them had seen their twelfth birthday. Neither could read nor write, but both could count. They ran off for more fuel, and came back with armfuls of wood which they had gleaned from the rubbish tip.

While they were away " Peggy " told us why they were so busy gleaning fuel, and reminded us that it was a long time since she had had breakfast. The hint was too obvious to be missed, so we invited her to a snack. When the children returned they came

over too, so on that first morning we had a merry breakfast party.

" You've just missed a raid," said " Peggy," " so you can rest content for a day or two. These chicks of mine can generally spot the police as they come up the road, so I have dodged them for weeks. It's a pity they can't leave us alone where we're doing no harm. It must be the 'kip house' keepers what keep them up to it. They're jealous because we don't use their lousy ' kips '. I'll watch getting lousy and paying eightpence for it too. I'd sooner have ' Mrs. Ashtip ' or ' Mrs. Greenfields ' any day."

After getting this off her chest she concentrated upon her second breakfast. At first she said that a cup of tea would do her, but once she got seated at the tins she ate a hearty meal. She told us her children's names were Ted and Daisy, and went on for half an hour assuring us that they both had the same father. Since we had not raised the issue it appears that there may be some doubt about it. However, one thing was sure : the children were pals and shared everything. These two could have given points to many a pair of children brought up in better circumstances. Whether it was the load they had to carry or the food they had to share, each considered the other. Owing to the watchfulness of the school-board authorities there are few children " on the road " in this part ; so Ted and Daisy had to live in a world of their own making. They had learnt the art of rabbit-catching and egg-stealing, and this went a long way towards keeping themselves. Most tramps are willing to give tea, sugar or jam, etc. for some rabbit meat when cooked, so the

children did not go short. Their leisure moments were filled by telling each other fairy stories, or getting some tramp to tell them one. It was probably stories told by tramps which made Ted crave to be a " Dick Turpin ", so that he could go about the country and steal from those who refused to help tramps and give the plunder to those who did. Daisy had no such violent ideas. True, she hoped one day to marry a very rich tramp, one who could afford a pram or a truck, but it must be of a pretty colour. She had her own ideas of colour, and in a corner of a cave she had stored all kinds of jars and bottles of different tints, and a collection of coloured paper and labels which she had gathered from the " tip ". On wet days Ted and Daisy found great joy in arranging and counting the bottles and jars. So long as they were in even rows they could tell easily how many there were, but when the bottles were in a heap and they were asked to count them their answer would be in terms of millions.

After breakfast Alice and I gathered more sacks, and chose an unoccupied cave. It was very dry, but the front was open. We hung some bags in front to keep out the wind, and made a bed with the others. As afternoon came on tramps began to return from Plymouth. Before dark there were about fifty men and women around the fires. That night the talk was mainly about two who had been caught in the raid, and who had been sent to prison for one month for sleeping out. In spite of the fact that we ran the risk of imprisonment, the camp always filled up soon after a raid. All were happy because there was no fear of another raid for a night

or two. After the usual camp-fire stories and sing-song we all went to bed.

Later that night we were disturbed by the children, who were running from cave to cave warning every-body of the presence of policemen. As we jumped up we heard men and women shouting as they ran about the " tip ". Men with flash-lamps were moving from one cave to another, turning out the occupants. Alice and I grabbed our kits and made off in the direction taken by several others. It was difficult going, as the ground was extremely uneven. It seemed, however, that the police did not intend to make any arrests, but only wanted to break up the camp. They called out that the Plymouth casual ward was open, and that it would be better for us if we made for it right away. Alice and I decided not to take their advice, and walked on through the night.

From Plymouth we roamed through the Midlands, eventually arriving back in London in November. I already had sad memories of the great metropolis, but the events which occurred almost as soon as we got back were deeply tragic in their significance for me.

Alice was taken from me as suddenly as she had come into my life. Some days after our arrival she caught a cold which developed into pneumonia, and after only a few days in a workhouse infirmary she passed away. She was given the usual cruel " pauper's funeral ", and I again felt the pangs of loneliness and despair.

CHAPTER EIGHT

A TRAMP never walks at night if he can help it, for not only is it dangerous because of traffic, but it is easy to get lost if you do not know the district. You have to keep to the main road because of the ditches and other obstacles that abound along the pathways of a country road, and so you have to put up with the motorist " road hog ". It is a sorry fact that most of the motorists who travel at night do not keep such a good look-out for pedestrians as they would in daylight. There are many records and sad memories of tramps who have been disabled or killed in road accidents. To be lost on the road for one night is bad enough, but I remember an experience in the west country when I was lost for days. It was in Blaina Valley in South Wales. I had been round by Nantyglo and had worked my way over to Tredegar.

From Tredegar I wanted to get to Abertillery, but instead of going round by Brynmawr I took a short cut " over the mountains ". I was assured that if I kept to a certain path I would come down between Blaina and Abertillery, but, like most short-cut paths, it came to an end long before I was in sight of my destination. I set out from Tredegar about ten o'clock one morning, and quite expected to be " over the hills " by late afternoon. I walked and walked, not seeing or hearing a soul, until suddenly the path I was following ceased to exist. I went on and on until night fell. As daylight faded I saw the flickers of lights, and tried to make for them. In the dark I could not pick my way, and at every turn I

was faced with a crevice or a hole of some kind. For hours I tried to find a safe way down the mountain towards the lights, but at last I decided to give it up and wait till morning. I lay down, pulled my coat around me, and tried to go to sleep. I slept a little, but was awakened by a feeling of intense cold. I opened my eyes, only to see that it was snowing. It was not settling thickly as yet, but it was sufficient to make the ground look like a vast sheet of white. I stood up and jumped about to get warm again. I fancied some tea, but alone on this mountain I had nothing to make a fire with. I could see no lights now, and could not tell whether it was because they had gone out, or whether the snow had obscured them.

The snow began to fall faster. The wind blew harder. I dared not move for fear of falling into a crevice in the ground, caused by mining operations many feet below.

For hours I was first jumping about then resting, until I began to wonder if I would ever get off this mountain by my own efforts. I thought of the many thousands of people who had room to spare, but would never think of the lonely tramp out in all weathers. A real feeling of loneliness came to me that night. If I had been near to help I wonder how many would have thought a tramp was worth helping ? I realized that I was alone, and it was not much satisfaction to know that on most of the roads and moors of the country there were others like myself, fighting against great odds for the right to live as human beings should.

It seemed brutal. Here in Wales, where people are almost fanatical in their theology, men, women

and children were walking the earth searching for food and shelter. Dogs are given kennels and food, horses have stabling and hay, but of course a churchman who gains his living by working these animals realizes that they are more valuable than a tramp. Many farmers would house and feed a stranger's cattle, but would send a tramp empty away.

As the snow settled, the side of the mountain took on an appearance of sameness. I could not distinguish the variations in the hill's surface. All pathways vanished, and all landmarks changed into " something white ". It was bitterly cold, and I was hungry. All I had had to eat was some bread and meat. I had tea and sugar with me, but could not make tea because there was no water to boil or fuel to burn. Daylight came at last, and I looked around me to judge the best way to go. Away in the distance I could hear trains working, so I tried that direction, believing that sooner or later I should see something to guide me downwards.

I walked and walked, and to my horror came to my own foot-tracks again. I had often heard of people walking in circles when lost, but had never realized that it was the disappointment which gave the greatest pain. For a long time I had walked hoping at every step that I should soon see my way to safety. It was no use sitting down waiting for someone to come along, for very few people cross the mountains in this weather. I listened, and distinctly heard a motor horn. I listened again to make sure of the direction, heard it a few moments later, and made towards the spot. I struck firm ground. The snow was not too thick for walking, and the ground

was fairly even. I had a new feeling of hope. Soon, I thought, I should be on the hard road waiting to find out where I was. On I went walking through a great circle of white, until I came to a sheer drop of some sixty feet. I was at the top of a long cutting. As far as I could see each way it was a huge drop to the bottom. I reasoned that somewhere the height must lessen, and at one point I might be able to drop over without hurting myself. I walked to the left. For over an hour I searched for a place to drop down, but I found none.

I retraced my steps and continued along the top in the other direction, but with the same result. At both ends of the cutting, instead of going down the mountain one had to go up and over the top. It was hard work climbing up again. I was hungry and tired, and all I had to eat was some sugar. The day passed, darkness was coming on, and I was faced with a second night out unless I could find a way down to safety. I rested a while, then made frantic efforts to reach my goal. It was no use. The weather beat me again. There was little time between dusk and darkness, and soon I was compelled to remain still for my own safety.

Worst of all was that now it was dark I could see gleams of light all around me. They appeared to be close, but the nearest must have been five miles away. The wind had dropped, but the cold increased. I grew very thirsty and licked snow, but it did not satisfy me. I struggled to keep awake, but became so tired that I had to lie down and sleep. How long I slept I don't know, but when I awoke it was hardly light, and my joints were stiff with cold.

Where I had been breathing on my jacket it was frozen more solid than stiff cardboard. My nose tingled, and my face felt as though it had been skinned. I tried to rise, but could not, for my feet were numbed. I wriggled on to my stomach and tried to crawl. Which way I went I cared not. My chief thought was to keep moving, so as to restore my circulation.

After a few minutes feeling returned to my feet, but it was so painful I wished I could cut them off. The pain was similar to " pins and needles ", but so severe that I shouted with the agony. I have often wondered since if animals caught in steel traps suffer half as much, and because of this experience I never again used any form of " gin " for catching rabbits.

I lay kicking and struggling with myself for a long time. When able to rise to my knees, I looked around. I remembered that if I were to find my way down it would have to be from the other side of the mountain, so I began to crawl upwards. After a long crawl I gained the top. Away in the distance I could see buildings which I thought to be houses, and a thin black streak which I hoped was a road or a railway track. I rested awhile at the top, then started to crawl towards the buildings. I was very weak now, and my progress was slow. As daylight came I had visions of safety before noon. Yet the long, weary day dragged on, and still the buildings seemed no nearer.

Hungry and exhausted, I had to rest again. Whether I slept or fainted I don't know, but when I regained consciousness everything seemed different. All around me were foot marks. It looked as if

hundreds of people had passed that way quite recently. I could not make it out, for surely no one could have passed without seeing me. The only conclusion I could come to was that I had roamed about while unconscious. I could not tell how far I had travelled, for as far as I could see up the side of the mountain were footmarks. I was overcome with fear. I realized that if I started to walk about while unconscious it would be easy for me to fall into one of the many crevices in the hillside. I looked back in the direction of the buildings, and decided to make them or die in my tracks. I broke into a sweat, and the ground seemed to be rushing past me. On and on I went until in front I saw a fence. I leaned against it for a while, then decided to follow it until it ended. Steadying myself by holding the top rail, I started off on what I hoped would be my last journey before meeting someone.

Hour after hour I crept on, until darkness was upon me again. I refused to stop, for I knew that the fence must lead me somewhere if I could only keep going. My hopes were raised high when I saw lights and heard road traffic. I almost shouted for joy. I tried to hurry, but I had little strength left. The lights seemed to be above me now, but right in front of me one shone out at me, then appeared to creep away. I yelled after it. I hoped that it was a motorist, and that there was a bend in the road at the end of the fence.

Another light flashed at me and passed. This time I knew it was a car, because I heard its engine. Forward I pushed until before me I saw a small bank, with a road on the other side. The feeling of

relief I had as I stepped on to a solid roadway made me temporarily forget the agony of the past two days.

I did not stop to think which way to go, but took the direction the motor car had gone. Once on the road I saw countless lights in all directions, but one gave me great joy, for it was moving towards me. I dared to hope that someone would give me a lift, so I stood still and held up my hand. On came the car, but as it neared me it only slackened pace, then accelerated and flew past. I felt a pang of regret, but tried to keep up my spirits, and trudged along as best I could. A small light came towards me ; it turned out to be a miner cycling home from work. As he came level with me he shouted " Good-night." I called to him to stop, and he dismounted and came back. I asked him where I was, and if I could get in anywhere for the night.

" Hell, man ! You tramping this weather ? " he exclaimed, in the peculiar accent of the district. " Why, you be committing suicide. Had any ' snap ' to-day ? "

I told him of my experience, and he took some sandwiches from a tin box and handed them to me together with his tea-bottle.

" I've got no tea," he said, " but there's a drink in that what might do you a bit of good."

I opened the bottle and drank deeply. It was beer the miner was taking home. I do not like beer, but now with the sandwiches it proved most acceptable. This act of kindness and the joy of meeting a human being again put new life into me.

" It's three miles to Abertillery on this road," he said, " but pull up any car you see and ask for a ride.

Good luck ! " Off he rode, after telling me it was just after seven.

I had a warm, pleasant feeling in my stomach now, and it gave me more courage. I stepped out determined to do the three miles as speedily as possible. Cars passed me, but though I hailed them all not one stopped to give me a lift. Foot-sore and weary, I crept into the old-fashioned town of Abertillery. Now that my journey seemed to be at an end I felt very sick and exhausted. I asked for the casual ward, but found that none existed in the town.

" Go to the R.O., son, he might fix you," said the man I asked. " I'll show you the way."

He took me to a side street and pointed out a house : " He lives there, son, and he'll do something for you."

I thanked him for his information, but did not tell him what I thought of relieving officers in general. I am glad I did not, for a very welcome surprise awaited me that night. I knocked at the door, and was answered by a lady. The relieving officer was not at home, but she invited me inside. To get inside a warm house was pleasant enough, but to be shown a chair before the fire was extremely comforting. I was treated with the greatest sympathy and kindness. I was given hot food, and this, together with the warmth of the fire, soon thawed me out. The relieving officer came in, and he and others sat and talked to me.

I could not help comparing this treatment with what I would have got had it been a London relieving officer. Here there was not the ugliness of the official office which I would have had to face in London.

Instead of a warm fire, hot food, and the attention of humane people, I would have been told to wait upon a hard form in a cold and draughty hall until the inhuman official was ready to see me.

I have made application to the London R.O's both when I have been well and when I have been sick, and never have I received attention without waiting an hour or two, and then having to put up with many insults and provocations aimed at getting me to drop my application.

As I knew the pigheaded and soulless outlook of the " London R.O.", it was exceedingly pleasant to meet someone in a similar position who did realize that an " applicant " or a " case " was human and had feelings. As there was no casual ward or institution in Abertillery I was put up at the local lodging house. I stayed there a week, during which I gained strength enough to continue with my journey.

It is with great gratitude that I remember this relieving officer and his wife, and that memory helps me to keep my balance when I come into contact with the callous members of the profession.

It is strange but true that the vast majority of Poor Law officials hate to see a tramp when he needs medical attention. Not always, however, does a tramp get a rough deal in the workhouse hospital or infirmary. It is true that in many cases when a man is " put in dock " out of a casual ward he does not receive the same treatment as the local poor person does. This is due to several causes, but the chief is an innate hatred of tramps on the part of those of the staff who have been born and bred in

" Bumbledom ", and trained according to the vile tradition of the Poor Law.

But where a hospital is staffed by modern people who have seen other aspects of life there is no discrimination. This is the position at Edmonton in North London. One night, feeling very sick, I entered the Edmonton casual ward, and was seen by a doctor, who ordered me to go to the infirmary in the morning if I was no better. On the following day I went to the infirmary, was given some medicine and told to return to the casual ward. During the day I rested in a cell, but at night I slept in a dormitory with about thirty other men. That night I was taken sick, but could not attract the attention of the porter. Some of the men tried to get him to come by knocking on the door and shouting, but after an hour of this we gave it up. In the morning I was unable to rise, but I was not noticed until a porter came round to see if the blankets were folded. Fortunately the superintendent also came upon the scene and saw at once that something was wrong. In a few minutes the ambulance was sent for to take me to the hospital.

My feelings were mixed as I was being driven away. I had had some rough times in workhouse hospitals, and wondered what sort of place I was being taken to. To my surprise my treatment was similar to that given to all others in the ward. The food was good, and the bed was comfortable. The doctors visited me, and there was a complete absence of that callous treatment which a tramp received in an old-fashioned poor law institution. Not once did I hear a nurse refer to me as a tramp. A well-trained

" Poor Law " nurse would have reminded me of the fact at every possible moment. When I was able to sit up and read my chart I noticed that instead of the word " VAGRANT ", which should have been written on it, there were two small letters, " C.W." No one except the nurses and doctors would know that those letters stood for casual ward, so there were no embarrassing moments on visiting days, when visitors at the adjacent beds are tempted to look at the charts of the patients on either side.

People looking at charts when they have no business to often get misled. When I was in jail in Canada a group of prisoners were lined up in a hall to see the " Warden ". Opposite us were some cells, on the outside of each were the letters V.D. in red ink. A lad next to me seemed quite thrilled, for he nudged me and said :

" Say, they must be hard cases."

I looked at the cells, then at him, and asked why.

" Look ! " he said, " they're kept locked up because they are ' very desperate.' "

When a tramp is in hospital he does not get many visitors, which is sometimes to his advantage. I was lucky enough to be next to a man who had plenty of friends come to see him. It was a rule of the ward that not more than three persons could visit any one bed, so an arrangement was made that three of my neighbour's friends should claim to be visiting me, which meant that he had six at a time. As a result little presents of fruit, eggs, etc., were left in my locker, and during my six weeks' stay I was given no less than twenty-two shillings.

If it were not for a certain amount of humour " on the road " many tramps would be broken during their first few years of tramping. Like most trades and professions, tramping has its famous incidents, the stories of which are handed down from old tramp to young tramp. Although these stories are told day after day and year after year, there is always someone to whom they are perfectly new. There is, for instance, the tale of a tramp who asked a Jew if he would give him sixpence for a bed.

" Bring it round and let's have a look at it," said the Jew.

A tramp once touched his cap politely to a passing lady and asked : " Can you help a man on the road, lady ? " " Why, certainly," the lady said, and taking the tramp's arm she guided him towards the gutter.

Another tramp was " calling " a house. The lady asked him why he could get no work, so the tramp explained that he was too light for heavy work and too heavy for light work. She seemed to accept the explanation, and moved off towards the kitchen. She stopped short, however, to ask :

" If I give you some dinner now will you be bothering me again in a day or two ? " The tramp gave her a friendly smile and said: " You know your cooking best, lady."

Which of course reminds me of the lady who was annoyed at a " repeat call ". " But aren't you the same man who had dinner from me last week ? " she said to the tramp. To which he replied : " No, lady, and the doctor says I never will be."

Women are supposed to be generous to tramps, but one lady I have heard of was by no means benevolent. She occupied a house which had a

fair-sized lawn in front. A tramp made his way through the gate, went down on his knees, and began to chew the grass. The lady came to the door and called out to him : " What are you doing there, my man ? " He rose to his feet and explained that he was so hungry that he had descended to eating grass. Surely, he thought, that would soften any woman's heart. But to his great surprise he heard the lady say : " My poor man, you come round to the back ; the grass is much longer there."

An amusing story is told of a tramp who had landed himself in the hands of the police. He alone knew whether he was guilty of the offence with which he was charged. The Clerk of the Court explained that according to the law he was entitled to free legal aid, and that if he made application a solicitor would be directed to defend him. He fiddled with his cap and thought for a while. Then he looked straight at the clerk and said : " Thanks all the same, sir, but I don't think a solicitor could help me much. But if you have some reliable witnesses I might use them."

Being " on the road " gives you an opportunity to meet many queer people, both in the " Poor Law " institutions and among respectable citizens. Some of the casual ward porters have earned a national, and in some cases international reputation.

One of these was known as the " Schoolmaster ". He earned his title because of his appearance and his funny ways. He took his job seriously, and his manner invited leg-pulling, but he generally came off best in any battle of wits. On one occasion when he was booking men in one man said he was a piano

tuner. The " Schoolmaster " looked at his muddy boots and corduroy slacks, and sniffed in his usual queer way. The navvy was proud of having pulled the old man's leg, until task time came. When the men were lined up the old " Schoolmaster " called out for the piano tuner. Thinking he had been picked for a light job, the navvy stepped forward airily.

" You are a musician ? " asked the old man.

" Yes," replied the navvy.

" Well," said he, smiling at the others, " take this hammer and knock ' Annie Laurie ' out of that heap of stones. It will cheer the lads up a bit."

A porter stationed at the casual ward of a racing town had a hard job finding room for the tramps who migrated to the town at the opening of a racing season. It was well known that if you did not get a cell the alternatives might be a hard table or the floor of a passage. Four young tramps thought of the idea of booking in as jockeys. They each gave the particulars of famous jockeys. When they realized that they would not get any preferential treatment, one said to the porter :

" Say, porter ! Ain't you going to find room for us in the cells ? We're jockeys, you know."

" I'm sorry, boys," wearily replied the porter. " I've only four cells left, and the owners and trainers aren't in yet."

Then there was the porter who was also a member of a local Evanglical church. One day when booking in a tramp he asked :

" Are you on the road to Glory ? "

" No, sir," said the tramp, shaking his head, " I'm turning back at Sheffield."

In later years Oxford also had its queer porter. I never learned his name, but we knew him as "Plus Fours". The tramps gave him this title because he was never seen in uniform, but always in a suit of pronounced plus-fours. He had the bark of a dozen sergeant-majors, but, unlike the soldiers, he had a sense of humour. He knew the men he was dealing with. He knew that most young tramps felt like knocking the stuffing out of him because of his shouting, and probably would do so if a smile was not raised. When sitting at his table six yards from the door, he would bawl out his questions. If there was any sign of resentment on the tramp's part he would point above his head to a pair of boxing gloves hanging on the wall, over which was a notice: "DO IT NOW."

I told some undergraduates about this habit, and they decided that next time I came to Oxford they would come into the casual ward with me. I saw possibilities of fun, so I made an appointment for two weeks later. Among the members of the "October Club" at Oxford are some who can put up a good show with their fists. Three of these students went into training for the next fortnight. On the appointed day I met them in a café in Oxford, and after I had fulfilled a lecture engagement arranged by a local literary club we four went up to the spike. I had not told any tramps what was in the wind, but I did advise a number to be at Oxford that day. So there was a large gathering of tramps waiting to go in when we arrived.

My appearance with three strangers caused some excited whispering, but none of them came to ask for more details. Out of the silence came a roar :

"Come on now! Let's have you."

The tramps slowly filed in one by one, to pass the cross-examination necessary before getting shelter for the night.

There were about six men left in front of us, when a man all flushed growled out :

"Do it nah, the bastard! I wish I had a gutful to-day, I'd show the swine! I'll have a go at him in the morning."

One or two of the others sympathized with him, and there was just a chance that a first-class riot was about to break out, when one of the students calmed them by saying :

"Now, boys! Just wait one moment, I'm next."

As he spoke he stepped forward to the front of the rank. His cultured voice and manner acted like magic. The tramps stared in amazement. It suddenly dawned on them that something was about to happen. "Plus Fours'" voice rang out :

"Next!"

With collar turned up and hat well over his eyes, the student stepped into the doorway.

"Good evening, sir," he said.

"Good evening be damned!" yelled "Plus Fours". "What's your name?"

"Horatius Archibald Algernon Smythe, S-M-Y-T-H-E," said the student.

"Whose bloody leg are you trying to pull? Come on. Give me your name."

"I have given you my name," said the student. "But assuming that you are unable to spell the words, I am prepared to effect a compromise and call myself 'James Smith': S-M-I-T-H."

" Plus Fours " could stand no more of this, so he pointed to the gloves.

" Do you see them ? " he shouted. " Any more funny stuff and down they come."

" Oh, Mr. Porter ! " cried the student. " Boxing gloves ! And eight-ounce ones, too ! Why, I haven't seen such a nice pair since the day I thrashed my young sister. What do you do with them, sir ? "

" I puts 'em on with refractory tramps," threatened " Plus Fours ". " Any more nonsense from you and it'll be me and you for it."

" Oh, how nice of you ! " the student replied. " I should love to have a go now."

The challenge was made. By now the rest of us were all crowding around the door. We urged " Plus Fours " to take it on.

" Do it now ! " one pointedly remarked. " Don't wait until he's rested overnight."

" Shut the gate ! " called out " Plus Fours ". And he took down the gloves.

We were all excitement ; it was the first time those gloves had been removed from their resting place for months. Since " Plus Fours " was ready to have a go nobody did or said anything which might draw the attention of other officials. He stripped to the waist. He was not physically well developed, but he had plenty of weight. The student had far less weight, but more developed muscles, and looked the picture of health.

We all took on the job of time-keeper and referee. The fight started, and in our excitement no one called "time". As the student was holding his own his pals did not interfere with the arrangements. The two went

at each other hot and strong for about ten minutes, when it became clear that training and development would win over weight and lack of experience.

" Plus Fours " took a delightful blow to the jaw, and went on his knees. Twenty voices chanted in unison : " One—two—three—." And at the call of ten " Plus Fours " was still out.

I must record two demonstrations of sportsmanship that night. The students stayed long enough to see that all was well, and " Plus Fours " took his defeat without any bad feeling or vindictiveness towards any of us.

This good nature of " Plus Fours' " atoned for much, and he was rarely called upon afterwards to " DO IT NOW ".

It was characteristic of " Plus Fours' " decency that he used his influence to get a wireless loudspeaker placed in the hut where the tramps slept. It was not his fault that the thing was never in working order. I myself saw tramps stuffing the horn with old socks and stale bread.

Another famous porter was known as "Scarface". He was at a casual ward just over the border of the L.C.C. area, and it always has its full share of tramps because it is used by those who are dodging the tyrannies of the London wards. The crowds are often so large that it is almost impossible for the authorities to put the compulsory detention regulations into operation. Instead of staying away for the statutory thirty days, many are back again in a night or two. One night " Scarface " grew a little weary when he had a " full house ". A tramp asked him where he was to put his clothes.

" Put 'em where you put 'em two nights ago," " Scarface " growled.

Sometimes of a Friday morning he would call out : " Now you men for discharge ! All men drawing dole or pension come on ! It's pay day ! "

Those who did not " sign on " would treat this as a joke, but it embarrassed those who were illegally sleeping in the wards while drawing money outside.

Owing to the large numbers of men stopping at this ward, they were formed into two gangs so that the task of wood-sawing could be fairly divided. It was " Scarface's " job to see that each man did his bit, and he was often to be heard asking a seated tramp whether he was " working " or " resting ".

Besides porters and tramps there are many other characters to be met " on the road ". Among others you find the budding novelist looking for " colour ", the journalist after " copy ", and the publicity hound who is seeking an opportunity to get his name before the public. My sympathy was always with the journalist, and many a talk I have had with one without any desire for payment. The novelist, especially of the " independent lady " type, would find it a little expensive to get inside information regarding spikes. But the worst type of all is the " publicity merchant ".

The outstanding example was the late Mr. Frank Gray of Oxford who gave an entirely false picture of Life on the Road ! The press said he went to get the true facts, that he dressed as a tramp, and that no one knew who he was. I don't like attacking a dead man

and I wish he were alive to answer me back, but he was in five spikes with me and so far as I know he never did a day's real tramping and he was certainly not unknown to the porters. I first met him driving a car near Wallingford. He said he was interested in the tramp's life and if I told him my story he might get something done to clean up the spikes. I next came across him in the old Reading Casual Ward. A tramp told me he had seen him being driven into the town. I didn't talk to him, but I watched him. The porters didn't call him Mister, but they were unusually civil and obviously embarrassed. He was given extra blankets and a light job of work. He didn't eat the food or wash in the filthy basins because he didn't need to. I met him again in another Oxfordshire spike, and he spoke to me. He was rather upset when I took one of his sandwiches without asking, and I wasn't surprised when I found it was a fine meat sandwich, fresh cut. He complained to the porter about me but I threatened to spill the beans so they promptly gave me tea and sandwiches. After this I was on very different terms with him. He never forgave me but he never said any more about doing good for the tramps. Gray's great object, like so many social workers, seemed to be to get all young tramps to join the army or navy. As about 80 per cent. of tramps are ex-service men this does not have much appeal to them. Gray had his chance and spent a good deal of money converting an old workhouse into a hostel and training centre, but he failed to find a remedy for vagrancy. Like so many others he had no real understanding of the life lived by those on the road.

CHAPTER NINE

AFTER the war conditions for tramps around London grew steadily worse. So bad did they become that there was grave danger of " bread riots " breaking out. There was not a district in London which cared in the least whether the tramp slept or ate at all.

Just about that time I heard of the possibilities of getting out to the colonies, where, it was said, conditions of employment were better. I read all the enticing literature, and attended lectures called for the purpose of explaining the possibilities of a new start in a new land. I was game to give it a trial, but the snag was that I needed money to the tune of twenty pounds. The " assisted passage " schemes had not then developed, and it was necessary for a man to pay his full fare to wherever he wanted to go. I tried many societies to see if I could get help to go to Canada, but in each case I had to get some sort of reference, or find persons who would stand for my fare.

The months and years passed and I could not get anyone interested, but each day I felt an ever growing desire to get out of England, and go somewhere where I might earn a livelihood and be able to enjoy the most elementary things of life. I watched the papers for the sailing days of boats taking people from this country to some far distant land. As each boat left I wished I was on it, for it would have meant a cessation of the daily search for a shelter.

I realized that I should never get enough money to pay my passage, so in 1925 I seriously began to think of " stowing away ". Daily I studied Lloyds' Register, and watched the regular sailings of ships bound for Canada. I learned that Southampton was the best port to start from, but I was advised to keep out of the town until I had decided which boat I was taking.

I studied the various boats and the times of sailing, and finally picked one and laid plans accordingly. I spoke to several seamen around the London Docks regarding my proposed adventure, but I received both encouragement and warning.

I was a prey to mingled doubts and hopes. The time went by, and only a few days before the date of sailing I had still not made up my mind.

At last the time came when I had to decide. I knew I would be taking great risks, but the reward of a new life seemed ample compensation. A ten days' sea voyage with no money or food was the price I had to pay for the chance of reaching a new country and new hopes.

I left London in the early hours one morning on a trek to Southampton. I planned to catch a lorry at Croydon so as to be in the town by evening. My luck was in. I arrived at the seaport town in the late afternoon. I had two clear days to get through before sailing day. I spent two nights in the casual ward, and made enquiries among the seamen there regarding the possibility of getting aboard the ship unnoticed.

I found out that to board the ship once she was ready for sea would be almost impossible. The

safest plan would be to go aboard a day or two beforehand and stay on board. I was told that it would be risky, for the quartermaster on the gangway might not let me pass without an order. This news rather damped my optimism, but did not make me give in.

The day I was released from the casual ward I went straight to the docks. My first job was to find out where the ship was, and then gain entrance to the wharves. The Southampton docks are not like those of London, and you cannot walk from ship to ship looking for a job. I could not find any way of getting a pass through the gate, so I had to rely upon pure bluff. At one gate I saw a number of engineers and riveters going in to work, so I fell in with the crowd and passed through safely. My first success gave me quite a thrill. It was up to me to keep calm, and then I would soon be aboard. I found the ship without mishap, but, to my dismay, found that nobody could get aboard without going up a gangway and passing a seaman at the top. Standing in the shadow of a large shed, I saw this seaman stop and question each person who did not appear to be working on the ship.

For fully an hour I watched, and saw that that way was barred unless I thought of a ruse to get me past the scrutiny of this sailor. My hopes were falling fast, time was going, and I must either get aboard or face the risk of going out of the dock again. I was beginning to think that my guardian angel had deserted me, when down the gangway came a number of men wearing little white jackets. A man in a blue patrol-coat mustered them on the quay, and led them to some lorries which were loaded with blankets

and bedding. As each man took his load from the lorry he shouldered it and went up the gangway. The Q.M. at the top stood aside, and took very little notice of them. This gave me an idea. If I could only get a load of blankets to carry up the gangway I could gain my objective.

As the men grew hot with their labours they discarded their jackets and waistcoats, and placed them on an empty lorry. In a flash I saw how I could get aboard. If I took my jacket off I could not be distinguished from the others, and if I could only get one load to carry I could pass the quartermaster. The worst snag was that to carry out this scheme would involve losing my own jacket. I solved that problem by creeping up to the empty lorry, and putting a white jacket over my own. Nobody noticed me, and as I fell into the rank and came to the tailboard of the lorry I received a bundle of blankets on my shoulders. Keeping in line with the others, I mounted the gangway.

Some of the men were singing and shouting, and they seemed to be untroubled by the steep angle of the gangway, but I felt myself going weak before I got half-way up. In sheer desperation I stuck to my task, and at last reached the top and stepped down on to the deck of the ship. Straight along the deck went the long line of men, until it turned into a doorway. Down some steps we went. At the bottom were piles of bundles which had been dumped there by those in front. As each man dumped his load he turned up the steps again and returned to the lorry for more blankets. The heap was so large that it was easy to slip behind it and not be seen by

any of the men engaged in carrying the loads. At the front end of the pile were two large lockers, and a squad of men was methodically storing the bundles away.

On my side of the ship was a long alleyway. Along one side of it were small alleys leading to cabins, while the other was a solid wall. I crept down an alley and opened one of the cabins. Inside were two bunks, a wash basin and a locker. In the bunks were mattresses, but no bed coverings. Obviously they were not in use yet, so I decided to stay in the cabin until things were quieter. I could hear the steady tread of the men carrying the blankets, and could plainly catch the backchat and banter passing between them. There seemed to be a general complaint that they had been called upon to do work which a crane or winch could have done more speedily and with less effort.

There appeared to be a lull in the operations. Instead of noisy shouts and the tread of feet I heard a low mumbling, which grew in volume until I gathered that there was some likelihood of their striking against the work.

Above the mumblings rose a loud voice : " Come on, my lads, only two more trips apiece and we're through."

It was the voice of authority, for I heard a movement up the steps again, and for some time all was quiet. I looked around the cabin. I realized that I should have to find a safer hiding place to hide in, but considered that there was no immediate fear of being discovered. At a squeeze the locker might hold me if anyone came down the alley. Once it was

dark I felt that it would be safe to lie down on a mattress and get some sleep, but until then I should have to be on the alert.

My feelings were mixed as I waited and listened in the silence. At last I heard the noise of men returning with more blankets. For a few minutes all was hubbub, but as the noise died down I heard footsteps coming into the alley leading to my cabin.

" Thank Christ that's over," said a voice. " Hell ! We signed on as stewards and they make us work like horses."

" Hold your noise ! " responded another. " Talk like that and you won't have any work at all. Come on in here and have a mike."

I held my breath, for I thought they were coming into my cabin. Luckily for me they entered the one next to it.

" Do you think we shall get away on time ? " asked one.

" Oh, sure ! " said the other. " I've never known us to miss a tide yet."

" Oh, well ! " returned the first, " forty-eight hours more and we shall be on the ' briny '. Blimey, I hate ' working by ' in port. I'd sooner be at sea any day."

" Every man to his choice," rejoined the other. " At least you can get a few hours' rest in port, but I'm damned if you ever rest at sea."

Their conversation went on, but I had lost interest in it. I was too preoccupied to listen. So forty-eight hours must pass before I knew whether I was to be successful in my attempt to leave the country. Two days watching and waiting, and not knowing

when I might be found and put ashore ! Forty-eight hours to go without any prospect of food, and I was hungry already !

A shrill whistle was blown, and in response doors were opened all round me, and I heard men moving away, offering up grateful thanks for the end of another day. I was left alone. My hunger pains were growing. I lay down on a mattress and tried to think things over. I decided that, after all, the risks I was taking were fully justified. My experience had shown me that very few people in Britain were concerned with the destitute unless he tried to get another man's job. I reasoned that conditions could not be worse anywhere else, and might easily be better. I felt secure for the night at any rate, and I tried to go to sleep.

It was rather cold, and I began to long for just one of the many blankets which I knew to be so very near to me. A good night's rest was important, so I took a chance and went in search of the lockers. I quietly opened the door of the cabin and listened. Not a sound could be heard. I went to the top of the alley. Still no sign of life, so I plucked up courage and moved towards where I knew the lockers to be. I thought at least I should have to force a door, but to my surprise one door was held to with a piece of rope. I found that the last few bundles of blankets had been thrown in anyhow, and they bulged so much that the door would hardly shut. I pulled the rope loose and opened the door. Instead of taking one blanket I took a bundle, and turned back to the cabin. Now it was an easy matter to settle down for the night, and soon I was fast asleep.

It was light when I awoke. But all was still, save for an occasional blast from a ship's siren. I had no idea of the time, but was sure it was early, since I could hear no workmen about. I was hungry and thirsty, and the more I awoke the more I felt the gnawing pains in my stomach. I had to decide between staying in the cabin and remaining hungry, and taking a chance in search of some food. I chose the latter course. I felt sure that in so large a ship there must be some food somewhere. As I crept into the long alleyway I heard the hissing of steam and the rhythmic throb of an engine. The sound appeared to come from a door farther down the alley. I went up to the door and looked in. I found I was looking down on the engine room. At a great depth below me were the engines which drove the ship along. From the doorway a grid platform led to another doorway on the farther side of the ship. From it an iron stairway led down in a series of flights to the floor of the engine room. I saw some men in oily dungarees moving about the various platforms, attending to the engines. This scene arrested my attention for the time being, but I was quickly reminded of my real mission by the gnawing pains in my stomach.

I was about to move away, when I saw a steward come through the door opposite, carrying two cups of tea and some toast. Without appearing to notice me he went down the steps to the engineers below. I lost sight of him as he descended. His appearance made me think hard. Somewhere through the door opposite me was a place where there might be some food. It might or might not be attended while the

steward was below. I had no idea how long he might be away, but as my belly called again for food I made a dash across the grid platform and entered an alleyway on the farther side. I went along this alley until I saw a open door, above which were the words "Engineers' Messroom". Inside I saw several plates and cups and saucers set out on a table. There was a large plate of slices of bread and butter, and also a partly used loaf and some butter on a plate. Nearby was a teapot full of tea, and a milk jug and sugar basin.

This glorious sight cheered me up. I grabbed some sliced bread and butter, but as I was about to turn back I heard footsteps coming towards me. I dived under the table and remained quite still. The footsteps halted at the door and turned into the messroom. It was the steward. He could have had no idea I was there, for he busied himself with some cups and saucers, and a few moments later was off again. I had a few minutes to spare, so I grabbed all the bread and butter I could see and wrapped it up in a tea cloth lying on the table. I also poured out some tea and quietly gulped it down. Two cups of tea with plenty of milk to cool it were followed by the rest of the milk. I emptied the sugar into my pocket and went out.

At the engine room door the way seemed clear, so I crossed over again and was soon back at the cabin. As I sat eating some of the bread and butter I realized that by now the steward would have discovered his loss, and might raise an alarm. Serious as this might be, it did not put me off eating my breakfast.

What happened when the steward returned to his messroom I never heard, but he could not have thought the loss was serious, or a search would have been made and almost certainly I should have been caught.

Hungry though I was, I found that I could not finish all the food I had taken, so I wrapped up the remainder and put it aside for my next meal. By now there were signs of life aboard the ship. Men were moving about in all directions except along the alleyway in which was my cabin. I began to think seriously about finding a safer place to hide in. I had one more night to get through before the ship sailed, but at any moment someone might come to get the cabins ready for the passengers who would be coming aboard the following day.

After much thought I decided to find the "coal-bunkers" and remain there until I could feel the ship moving. The idea of taking blankets with me gave me great heart. I guessed that I might find an entrance to the bunkers somewhere near the engine room. I first set out to get my bearings, then I would watch for a favourable opportunity to take some blankets with me and so get out of the way for the next day or two. I could not see an entrance anywhere near the engine room, and I had to take a chance by going out on deck. Here I was more fortunate. I found an open hatchway and saw coal all around the inside. There was an iron rung ladder, which made descent easy. I went to look around. It was very still and dark. The light from the open hatchway revealed that there was lots of room on top of the coal where I could sit and not be

seen. I returned to the cabin, folded two blankets together, and took them to the hatch. I dropped them inside and returned for more. Although men were moving about and must have seen me, no one questioned me or took any notice.

After an hour of patient watching and waiting I had dropped down the entire bundle of blankets which I had taken from the locker the night before. I had the bread and butter and sugar which was left from my breakfast, but no drink. This was a real difficulty. I knew the hardship of thirst, but I did not know where I could find any water, or what I could carry it in if I did. I remembered the engineers' mess, but I thought it wise to keep away from that place as long as I could.

The situation was getting desperate. It was far too risky to descend into the bunkers for any length of time without water, so I had to go farther afield in search for it. By now there were men of all descriptions moving about the decks. Under cover of the numbers I went towards the bows of the ship. Here were the fo'castles, for which a boy was drawing water. He seemed to be in need of plenty, for he pumped two pails-full and carried them inside. He came out again soon after and pumped more. I saw a worker go up to the boy and get a drink from a mug which was handy. That decided me. I would go and take a drink of water, and see if it was possible to bring more away with me.

As I was drinking the boy said to me :

" That's the stuff what makes lions roar. But give me a good old ' four ale ' and I'll roar like hell."

Taking a chance, I replied :

" Sure it's good stuff, this water. And my mates would like some, but I've lost their can."

Without a moment's hesitation the boy replied :

" Why don't you take them a jug full ? Will you bring it back if I lend you one ? "

" Why, of course," I promised. And before I realized what had happened I was walking along the deck with an enamel jug full of water.

This sudden turn of events almost unnerved me. It was difficult for me to control my feelings. I could have laughed and cried at the same time. I had been in despair in my fear of thirst, and I had had this jugful thrust upon me as if it were a common thing for men to go and fetch water in this way.

Now that the time had come for me to descend into the darkness of the bunker I felt a cold sweat come over me. It may have been fear, or it may have been the effects of the long drink I had had at the pump ; but whatever it was it nearly caused my undoing that day. I felt almost afraid to step on to the ladder of the hatch.

The sight of the jug brought me to my senses. If I were questioned regarding it my plans would be found out. It was most important that I should hide it, and the best place for that was in the bunker. Down the steps I went. At the bottom I picked up the blankets and threw them into the darkness. Taking the water with me, I crawled after them. Once out of the dim square of light which came through the hatchway, I sat down and felt for the most comfortable place to rest in. By moving some lumps of coal a little I made a spot fairly level, and not too bad to lie upon because I had plenty of

blankets. I tied my handkerchief over the top of the jug so as to keep out the dust.

Then another bright idea occurred to me. As I had plenty of blankets I could take off my clothes and wrap one around them, so that if, and when, I went up on deck I might pass muster in a crowd. I undressed and made a bed. I was only just in time, for a few minutes after I had settled down I heard a bang, and I was in complete darkness. The hatch had been covered in, and I heard knocking caused by the men fastening the battens which hold down the hatch covers. The sounds from the deck were muffled. In the stillness and darkness of the bunker I began to wonder if I could ever get out again. Was there any other way out? I hoped there was, but I did not know. I felt for my bread and jug to see if they were safe. All was well. I offered up a prayer for safe keeping and guidance, and tried to sleep.

But sleep was out of the question for some time. As I lay there in that inky silence my brain grew active, and I began to make plans in case I ever saw daylight again. As soon as the ship was moving I would try to find an outlet leading to fresh air, and then under cover of darkness I would search for a new and safer hiding place. I was gambling on the chance that at night-time I could mingle with the passengers without much fear of detection. So long as I did not come in contact with any of the crew or officers no one need know that I was not a passenger.

All this passed through my mind as I lay in this "tomb". How long I had been there, or how long

I was still to be there were questions I could not answer. Judging by what I heard afterwards I could not have been down there more than forty-eight hours. When I fell asleep for the last time all was as quiet as before. But when I woke up I felt the motion of the ship, and heard the muffled throbbing of the engines. I lay perfectly still, listening to that regular throb, which seemed to be singing to me: "Wait a bit." So I took it as a warning and remained quiet.

My first task was to decide which way I would go. In the pitch darkness I had no means of getting my bearings except by the sound of the engines, or by feeling for a bulkhead and following it until it led me somewhere. I chose to move slowly towards the engines. I was about to dress, when I realized that if I did so my clothes would be ruined. And if I were seen in coal-dusty clothes I would soon be hauled up short for investigation. I tore up some blankets and bandaged my feet and legs, so that I could crawl over the coal without too much pain. I wrapped three blankets round my body, took a last swig of water, and started to crawl towards what I hoped would be fresh air and sunshine. I wormed along the side of the ship, and once I touched iron I kept close to it and crawled towards the sound of the engines.

It was very hot and the air was foul. Several times I fell some feet because the coal shifted owing to my weight, or with the motion of the ship. More than once I came to what I thought were yawning chasms, but they proved to be only large holes where the coal had not been "trimmed"

evenly. After a long and agonizing crawl I came to a bulkhead running at right angles to the one I had followed. Here I heard another kind of noise : the sound of coal falling in large quantities. When I placed my ear to the wall I could distinctly hear voices. I could not tell what they were saying, but their closeness to me gave me heart, and I sat down and rested. The sound of falling coal continued and drowned the voices I had heard. I was wondering what to do next, when, to my amazement, a light flashed some yards away from me. I was so surprised that I nearly shouted ; taking hold of myself, I sat perfectly still and held my breath. The circle of light, which came from a torch, was flashed across to the other side of the ship. I heard someone moving, but could not see any form. The beam of the light moved as if it were floating on the air.

Another light appeared, and I heard a voice say :

" Hello Mac, she'll run for another two watches yet."

And then the reply :

" That's fine. Come on down then."

The second light disappeared, and the first moved slowly back towards the wall. One thing was certain : at the spot where the lights vanished must be some way of getting out of this bunker. I waited awhile, then I started my crawl to the spot. Feeling my way carefully, I came to a small opening in the wall. It was not like a door, nor was it very large. There was just enough room for a man to pass through comfortably. I thrust my head through the hole to see what was on the other side. All was pitch black. I put my hand out, and felt another wall only an

arm's length away. I looked up, and saw nothing. When I looked downwards I could see a faint flicker of light. The air coming up was very hot and stuffy. I drew back, and by contrast the atmosphere in the bunker was pleasantly cool. I put my arm through the hole again, and felt about ; at last my hand rested on the rung of an iron ladder, like the one I had used to come down into the bunker. I tried to judge how far it went down, but could not tell. Because of the ship's motion I did not fancy the idea of descending a vertical ladder not knowing how far down it went, or at what place I should land when I got to the bottom.

But, as I knew of no other way out, and as I had had enough of the bunkers for one life-time, I decided to step on to the ladder and chance where I got to. Going down I experienced one of the worst journeys of my existence. The ladder was perfectly upright, the rungs were about eighteen inches apart, and only one foot wide. The ship seemed to be doing a corkscrew motion. It was rolling from side to side and also seesawing up and down. I clung firmly to the ladder, and went down one rung at a time. I was in a closely confined space which must have been an " upcast " ventilator, because the air was very hot.

Looking up I saw nothing ; but when I looked down I seemed to be at a dizzy height, and this made me cling to the ladder so tightly that my hands became sore. Down and down I went, all the time afraid of losing my foothold and being hurled to the bottom of the shaft. Many thoughts ran through my mind during the climb, but I was chiefly

concerned with what I should do when I reached the bottom. All I could see was a circle of light, and this meant that someone might be there. And if I was seen there was no chance at all of getting out of sight again. The blankets around me were in the way now, but I did not dare to let them fall, for fear that they might attract attention and bring someone to the bottom of the shaft. I was wondering if I should discard the blankets from my body and hang them over a rung in the ladder, when my foot stepped down on to something firm. I gingerly pressed against the obstruction, and found it to be immovable. I glanced downwards and still saw the light below, but only through small bars. I had landed on a gallery which appeared to be built of iron rods about a half-inch in diameter, two inches apart, and making a platform some two feet wide.

With my feet on something firm I was able to rest. I moved a little away from the shaft, and at once came into a cooler atmosphere. After a long rest I untied my clothes and dressed. Once I had my boots on I felt more comfortable when I moved about. I did not want to leave the blankets on this landing, for they might be found and so raise suspicions that a stowaway was on board. So I bundled them together and carried them with me, hoping at any moment to see a way of disposing of them so that they would not be found.

I moved along the gallery until I came up against a wall. I felt for and found the handle of a door. I turned the handle, opened the door, and stepped into a small compartment which smelt strongly of oils. I closed the door behind me and listened. Not

a sound did I hear except the throb of the engines. I felt about in the dark to see if there was another exit to this place. From the different objects I came in contact with it was clear that I was in some kind of store-room. I dropped to my knees and crawled about, searching for a door by which I could get out. For some minutes I searched without success. At last I felt a gentle, soft draught on my face, as if I was near a door which did not close tightly. I moved in that direction and found I had guessed aright, for I came to a door which had a similar handle. I looked out, and saw a long, dimly lighted passage-way. I withdrew into the store-room, and considered my next step. I realized that from now on any false move on my part would lead to discovery. I must not be seen by anyone until I had had a wash. Where I was to get one I did not know, but that was my first objective. I opened the door again and peered out. I wanted to find out whether it was day or night-time. I could not tell by the light, but as I had not seen or heard anyone for some time I guessed it must be night.

I stared along the passage, but could see nothing which would help me to decide where I was. I stepped out, looked in the other direction, and saw an opening leading on to the deck. If I moved quickly I could get out and dump my bundle of blankets overboard. Once I had got rid of them I should feel more safe. I realized the folly of creeping about, for if I were caught in that passage I could not hide anywhere. Stealthiness would not help at all, so I picked up my bundle and walked straight to the

opening. There I found that I was only a few paces from the ship's side. Nobody was about. Stepping out on to the deck, I went to the side and dropped overboard the blankets which had served me so well. Having got rid of that incriminating evidence, I looked for a place where I could get a wash. It was night-time and there was a moon; by its light I could distinguish objects on the deck. I noticed a large hatchway with winches at one end of it. From behind these winches a mast rose to a tremendous height. I heard footsteps overhead, so I drew back into the passage.

A sailor came down a flight of steps quite close to me. He went along the deck for about twenty-five yards, and passed through an opening similar to the one I was standing in. I kept in the shadow of the passage and waited. After a few minutes he returned and went up the steps again. I heard his footsteps die away. All was quiet now, so I decided to find out what was beyond the opening opposite. I went along the deck and passed through the doorway. Inside a dim light was burning, and I saw several lavatories and two shower baths.

Here was a break which cheered me up wonderfully. I could have a bath, if only I could find some soap and something to dry myself with. Hearing footsteps approaching, I went into a water-closet and closed the door. This was as good a cover as any, and I felt safe. I could now sit and quietly plan how I was to clean myself up so that I could appear on deck without raising suspicions.

The footsteps receded and died away. I crept out again and had a look at the shower baths. There

were four wash-basins in one corner, and luckily for me there were several pieces of soap, which I collected and put in my pocket. I was getting quite light-hearted now; my only fear was of being caught bathing, for I did not know which bathroom I was in. If it was for the use of passengers I might pass without notice, but if it was reserved for the crew there might be complications if I were seen.

With a view to safety I decided to undress in a water-closet and be ready to take cover should the need arise. My luck was in. I had a bath without being disturbed. I did find that only one piece of soap was any good, for as the water was "sea water" ordinary soap was useless, and specially prepared soap was required.

I withdrew into my hiding-place, and, as I had no towel, allowed myself to dry. I might have used my shirt, but then I should have had to dry that. The cold water freshened me up, I felt my blood glowing, and I lost the tired feeling from which I was suffering. I dressed and awaited events.

I developed a strong desire for a cup of tea and something to eat. But I had no hopes of anything until daylight, when I might be able to stroll about and find something.

Daylight came very quickly, and not long afterwards I heard voices and the sound of running water accompanied by the swishing of brooms. It was the morning operation of washing down the decks. After the sailors had passed to other parts of the ship I took a look around. I could see several people promenading up and down the deck on the farther side of the ship, while others were standing in groups,

smoking. I decided that there were enough people about to justify my going on deck, so I crossed to the other side, walked up some steps, went to the railings and looked at the sea.

As I stood gazing at the water seething by I was amazed to think that there were such vast stretches of water with nothing in sight. The ship appeared to be in the centre of a huge circle, and no matter how fast or slow it went, or even if it changed its course, nothing could alter the sameness of the horizon. The vessel was moving with a steady, rolling motion ; I found it tiring to stand, so I looked for a seat. I found a sheltered corner out of sight of almost everybody, and out of the wind. I took deep breaths of air, and gradually all the bad effects of my experience in the bunkers passed from me.

Meantime more and more people were coming on deck. Men and women walked up and down as if they were on the parade ground of a military barracks. They all seemed to be happy and enjoying themselves. I began to think seriously about food. While I was meditating an old gentleman came and sat down on the seat.

" Fine morning, my lad ! Grand morning ! " he greeted me.

" Yes sir," I replied. " It's a splendid morning."

" Have you been up long ? " he asked.

" Only about half an hour," I answered.

" Ho ho ! " he chaffed, " a proper lie-a-bed you must be. Why, I was up and doing my daily dozen two hours ago."

I was not prepared to argue with him, for I might have had to explain where I was two hours before.

So I let him have his say. He needed no encouragement ; he could talk for a dozen, and still not be out of breath. He was not exactly boastful, but he certainly seemed anxious to let me know that he was the best sailor on the ship, and had crossed the " Western " more times than anyone else on board.

I was afraid to cultivate too close a friendship with him, for fear that it might be my undoing, so I hinted that I was not a good sailor, and in fact felt rather seedy.

" Well, well ! " he said, " I'll show you how to get rid of all that. Get on your feet, my lad, and let's walk."

I could not think of any way out, so I rose and let him lead me to the middle of the deck.

" You'll be all right once you get your ' sea legs,' " he said. " Don't look at the waves or think of the motion of the boat, but just walk naturally as if you were on land."

He took my arm, and we started promenading. He was a little taller than I, and much more robust. He was almost bald, but had a large brown moustache, and was wearing tennis shoes, grey flannel trousers, a sports jacket and sweater.

Without bothering me with questions as to who or what I was, he entered upon a long story of his adventures at sea. He must have made himself popular on the boat, for most of the people we passed called some cheery word to him. After about an hour of promenading he descended to criticism of the ship's service and similar matters. He complained about the cabins, the food, the lack of social arrangements, and most of the stewards, One man,

however, had not earned his condemnation. It was his " table steward ". As he mentioned this man I was reminded that the most acceptable help I could have had at the moment would have been any kind of " table steward ".

" By the way," he said. " Which table do you sit at ? "

At last he had started asking awkward questions. I decided to try bluffing it out.

" Oh, I haven't been to table yet," I replied. " I have been so sick."

The old man looked amazed.

" What, pay a high price for food and then not eat it ? Sir, what sort of economy is that ? You must start eating at once."

There was none more willing to obey that command than I was, but the question was how. I told him I did not feel like eating in the saloon, because of the stuffiness of the atmosphere down there.

" Damme, you're right there, my lad. It is pretty close. But you shall eat to-day, even if I have to bring your meals on deck to you."

How I refrained from laughing, or even throwing my arms around him and kissing him I do not know, but I kept as calm as possible, and resolved to let him do what he would. At that moment a gong sounded, and most of the passengers made a move towards the gangway.

" That's only the first," said my friend. " The proper one will ring in ten minutes."

We had walked back to the seat from which we started, and I went as if to sit down.

" If you feel you can't make it this morning, I'll

get my steward to bring you something. You stay here so that he can find you. So long." And off he went for his breakfast.

In the silence which followed I had to decide whether I should take a chance and have a meal, or go into hiding and search for food later. I was in a quandary. If the steward brought me anything and could not find me he might tell the old gentleman. Then I was sure he would search for me, and if I was not to be found he might even enlist the help of others to find me. And that would at once lead to difficulties. To bluff it out was the better plan, for if I was questioned by the steward, I might take to cover while a report was being made. To give colour to my story I lay on the form and pretended to sleep. In this position I was found by the steward, who brought me some food on a tray.

" Are you the Captain's friend, sir ? He asked me to bring you something."

I almost died of fright. Surely the old gentleman was not the ship's captain ? Then it occurred to me that he might only be an officer in one of the " Services ", so I recovered myself and murmured : " Thanks."

" It's not wise to go without food, sir," said the steward. I inwardly agreed with him.

I sat up slowly, wishing all the time that the man would go away. If he was going to stand there while I ate he was in for a big surprise. I might be able to feign sickness and loss of appetite when no food was around, but with a tray of eggs and bacon, toast and tea beside me, I was in no mood for acting.

" You have not been to table yet, sir, have you ? "

the steward went on. " I expect you're one of those missing at my table. I have been five short ever since we sailed. I don't mind being of service, sir ; after all that's my job. If there is anything I can do, sir, I shall be pleased to do it. Leave the tray, sir ; I'll collect it later."

He went off, and I was alone again. Without ceremony I polished off all the food on the tray. I could easily explain the disappearance of every bit of food by saying I had thrown it to the gulls. The way things were moving made me a little nervous. I wondered how long my luck would last. It was too much to expect that meals would be brought to me for the rest of the journey, so I had to make other plans. I did consider trying to impersonate one of the " five missing ", but sooner or later they would recover from their indisposition and claim their seats.

Another difficulty I had to overcome was to find out how long the ship had been " at sea ". If I struck up an acquaintance with anyone and could not talk intelligently on such topics I would arouse suspicion at once.

Feeling more fit after my meal, I decided to inspect the ship and get my bearings. I felt safe to walk about, for no one need know who I was. When I reached the gangway and was about to descend I was hailed by the " Captain ". I thanked him for his kindness, but he waved his hand and said :

" Forget about it. My steward will do anything for me."

He spoke of the steward as if he were his personal valet, but I did not feel inclined to complain of or

condemn the attitude of one who had " saved my life ".

" Where are you off to now ? " he asked. " I hope you're not going to your cabin to get away from this fresh air."

" Oh, no ! " I replied. " I'm just going for a walk round, so that I can get acquainted with the ship."

" That's right," he replied. " You'll find a comfortable smoker on the upper deck, and," he added with a smile, " a good bar with lots of good things to help sea-sickness."

I smiled back at him, and moved off quickly, for I was afraid that further conversation might lead to the universal " Come and have one ", when my poverty would be embarrassing. I was glad, however, that I had this information regarding the " smoking room ". There was sure to be a crowd there, and I might find a comfortable seat and while away many hours.

Going down the stairs, I found another door leading to yet more stairs going down. On the wall of the passage at the bottom of the stairs was a notice board. Several people were reading the many notices. In the centre of the board was a large chart indicating the course the ship had travelled and recording the distance in knots of each day's sailing. This was the very thing to put me wise to what I wanted to know. I looked at it, and found the ship had left Southampton at noon three days before, and had travelled six hundred and forty miles up to noon the previous day.

Next to the chart was a smaller notice announcing

the winner of the " sweep " on the day's run. Turning to my left I saw a door with a glass panel in it, and looked through. It led to the saloon. Some stewards were busily laying tables for the next meal. I turned away and went along a long alley, which proved to be the one I had used on my first day aboard.

My curiosity almost led me to peep into the cabin I had hidden in, but I thought better of it. I had quite a thrill when I saw the blanket locker, for an idea occurred to me. If the door was no more securely fastened than when I last saw it I might make it my headquarters for the rest of the trip. There were too many people about for me to make a close inspection at the moment, but I did notice that the door was still fastened with rope.

I went back up the stairs out on to the deck, and made my way to the " smoker ". This was on the deck above the one where I had met the " Captain ", and was the popular resort of all those who liked to drink, smoke and gamble. As I opened the door I was met by a cloud of smoke. The air inside was warm, and the smoke hung about like a mist. There were few empty seats, but I found one in the corner of a settee built around a card table. Fortunately there was a porthole open above my head, so the air was fresher in this spot.

At this end of the room cards were being played at about a dozen tables. " Bridge " and " Rummy " seemed to be most popular, but the " school " at my table was playing " Solo Whist ".

I tried to settle down to some hard thinking. But I was quickly fascinated by the slick way one of the

men was handling the cards. He dealt out the cards very quickly, but at times I was sure he dealt one from the bottom of the pack. I watched intently every time he dealt, and was convinced he was a crook. I studied his face so that I could pick him out if I saw him on deck, for I felt sure that I could make my knowledge worth a feed or two during the rest of the voyage. It was not my business to tell those who were playing with him, so I sat back and tried to think of a plan for making capital out of my lucky find.

Play went on until the first gong went for lunch, when most of the " Schools " broke up and the players strolled out on deck. The gong had the effect of bringing me to my senses. Here was lunch-time, and I had no plans for food. By the time the second gong went I had done some furious thinking. I reasoned that if I was to benefit from the information I had got by watching the crook dealer I must keep myself fit, which meant that I must eat regularly. To do that it was obvious that I must gain admission to the saloon. I decided to follow the crowd, and look out for the steward who had brought me my breakfast. From the door of the saloon I saw him standing about half-way down a row of tables. I went straight towards him. As he saw me he moved to a chair and stood behind it.

" This chair is vacant, sir," he said. " There has been a good deal of transferring from one table to another, but I hope you will be all right."

I was hoping he would not ask me who I was and in what berth I slept, but if he did I was ready to give the first name that came to mind and chance

whether he checked it at once. He asked no questions, so it was clear he thought I was a passenger who had been allocated to his table. My one hope now was that the rightful owner to my seat was sick and would remain sick for that day at least.

While I was collecting my thoughts I heard the " Captain's " voice :

" Well, well, my lad ! So you've taken the bull by the horns, eh ? " and he smiled very knowingly.

A sudden fear took possession of me. Was he pulling my leg, or was it just an ordinary remark which I was misinterpreting ? I felt uneasy and wished I was far away, but to get up and go out at this stage would certainly arouse suspicion. Lunch dragged on. There was pea soup, cod, cold roast meat and potatoes, and jam tart. The most lively person at the table was the " Captain ". The steward gave him great attention, and certainly met all my needs, but he was not so particular with others at our table.

The two chairs next to me were occupied by old ladies between sixty and seventy years of age. There were two other young men, the " Captain ", three men of similar age, and one woman who was about forty-five and had two daughters of about eighteen and a little son who was ten. An old man about sixty sat next to the boy, and this completed the personnel of the table. There were still two empty chairs. I took little part in the conversation, because I did not want to encourage anyone to talk. The " Captain " tried his best to draw me out, but gave it up and concentrated on those near him.

Lunch over, the people made tracks for the deck. A curious feeling of relief came over me as I stepped out of the saloon. I was even more glad to get out of the place than I was to get in.

As I was going up the crowded companion-way I felt someone take hold of my arm. I turned sharply, and looked into the " Captain's " smiling face.

" Feeling better, my lad ? " he asked.

" Yes, thanks ! " I replied. " I'm feeling quite fit."

" That's fine ! " he said. " Come, let's have a stroll to shake that meal down."

He still had hold of my arm, and we went to the upper deck and walked up and down for half an hour. His conversation was harmless enough for a time, and did not lead to any embarrassing situations, but then it turned to a more personal note.

" Are you staying ' East ' or are you going ' West ' ? " he asked.

I did not know he was referring to my plans on landing, and assumed he meant the direction the ship was steering.

" I'm going ' West,' " I replied.

" And I'm making for Calgary. Are you passing the ' Peg ' ? "

I was more than sorry these questions had cropped up. By some inspiration I guessed that the " Peg " referred to the city of Winnipeg, but whether I was going to pass it or not I had no idea. To get out of the difficulty I explained that my plans were unsettled. I was going in search of work, and the direction I took would be influenced by the state of the labour market.

" What profession do you follow ? " he asked me.

I thought of the vast lands of Canada, and said : " Oh, farming, or perhaps a little ' Lumber Jacking.' "

I had read of the lumber camps, so I thought I was safe in saying this.

" You will have to go to the far West for the lumber camps," he said. " But you'll find plenty of hard work in the ' Middle West.' "

The conversation was now turning to a more interesting subject, and I hoped he would go on talking about the different lines of work, because the information would be useful to me later.

" Are you interested in buying a piece of land ? " he asked me.

" No," I told him. " At least, not until I earn some money. My first task on landing will be to find a job so that I can keep going."

I got this point across him so that he would not expect me to buy drinks at the bar.

" You're sort of making a new start, eh ? " he smiled. " Well, you have my best wishes for success, and I hope you get on the same as I have."

As he had helped me so much I was prepared to listen to the story of his great successes in life, but to my surprise he did not carry on in that vein. Instead, he led me to a group of people who were sitting in camp chairs drawn up in a circle. We found a tea-party in progress. The " Captain " was at once invited to join, and I also automatically received an invitation. There was no chair handy, so I sat on the deck. An old lady handed me a cup of tea and biscuit.

" One needs a cup of tea after a heavy lunch, don't you think ? " she said to me. " But the tea this ship provides is abominable."

I thanked her, and remarked that her opinion of ship's tea was similar to mine. By the tone of the conversation that went on between the members of this party I realized that I had bumped into a circle of middle-class artist people. How I was to hold my end up among this crowd was my immediate problem, and I decided to act the shy and silent lad until I had weighed up the party more.

CHAPTER TEN

FROM the conversation I learned that the ship was due at Saint John in six days' time. This news was welcome, but it made me wonder how I was to get through the period until the arrival in port. Luckily for me the talk went on general lines, and only questions that needed a formal answer were addressed to me.

It was a queer group of people, and, apart from the " Captain ", there were only three who aroused my interest. One was the old lady who served the tea, and the other two were a young man and woman who had just married and were going to Banff for a holiday. The rest of the group was made up of those types of people to be seen in Bloomsbury and Chelsea. I liked the old lady very much. She was tall and majestic. Her hair was almost white, and her eyes declared to the world that she could be relied upon to be honest at all times. She had gained everybody's respect, and she contributed much to the social enjoyment of all who came into contact with her. She spent her time reading books in a chair on deck. It was only in the evening that she took a stroll. Although she was not crippled, she found it difficult to move about alone because of the motion of the boat.

The other two were only a pair of " priceless young things ". They were enjoying themselves. Their conversation was carried on in the exaggerated and

over-emphasized speech which seems to be the language of our young intellectuals to-day.

The " Captain " moved closer to me.

" Well, my lad, we shall have fun here to-night. There's going to be a first-rate concert, and anyone who can do anything is expected to help fill the bill. Now what can you do, eh ? "

" Oh, I'm afraid I cannot do anything in that line," I replied hurriedly. " I'm sure I could not face a crowd of people all looking at me."

" Well, well ! " he said, " I was sure you would give a song or a recitation, and so I've put you down to do something. Pluck up courage, my lad, and you'll think of something."

He turned to others near by and got them to agree to contribute their share to the entertainment. Even if I had been able to sing or recite it would be risky for me to take part in the programme, and I thought that my best plan would be to get out of sight while the concert was in progress. It would mean hiding from the " Captain " and explaining it away when I met him again, which of course would mean more danger for me. I could not come to a decision at once, so I banished the question from my mind and concentrated on other things.

The group broke up, and when I saw my chance to slip away unnoticed I went to the upper deck and entered the smoking-room.

The card " schools " were going strong, and I looked around for the " crook dealer " I had seen that morning. I saw him playing at a table, so I went to a seat near by and watched him again. I could not tell whether he " stacked " the cards, but

I was certain he dealt some from the bottom of the pack. While at times he made obvious bad slips and lost in the course of the game, he consistently won when he himself dealt. He was a plausible sort of man, and made friends with everybody. I tried to think of a way of getting into conversation with him. I needed some help to see me through the rest of the journey, and if it was to be in the form of cash this was the man most likely to do it.

The late meal described as " dinner " was at seven. The " schools " broke up just after six, and most of the players went out on deck. Near me was an empty table, with a pack of cards left on it. I slipped into a chair and toyed with the pack, then began a game of patience. After a few minutes the man I wanted to talk to came over and spoke to me.

" That's a safe game," he said, giving me one of his sociable smiles. " You can't lose much at that if you only play yourself."

He leaned over me as if to see the cards more clearly. Like a flash I saw how I could get my first thrust at him.

" Oh, no," I said. " I can't lose at all, for if they won't run out by dealing from the top I try dealing from the bottom."

He gave me a sharp look, but only for a second.

" But that's not fair," he said. " The rule is that cards shall always be dealt from the top."

I glanced quickly around to see if anyone else was in earshot. The smoking-room was empty, so I said in a low tone :

" I always thought that rule applied to ' Solo ' as well."

The thrust got home. Instead of punching my head as might have been expected, he put his hand upon my shoulder and said :

" What's biting you, son ? Have you lost anything to me ? "

" No," I told him, " and as I'm broke you stand no chance of getting anything from me."

He stood in deep thought for about a quarter of a minute, then said :

" Would you like to earn a few easy bob ? "

This sounded good, so I told him if I could be of service to him I was ready to help.

" Well, not exactly help me," he answered. " But if you played a little and won a few bob it wouldn't mean anything to you if others lost ? "

I remembered all the greed and avarice of the average man, and I could think of nothing to suggest that the other players cared a damn for me, so I expressed my willingness to fall into line with his proposal.

" Of course you mustn't play all day," he said, " but you ought to let others see that you win a little. If you can keep a still tongue in your head, you can have spending money on the trip and land with money in your pocket as well. Have you any job to go to ? "

I told him I had no special job, but would take the first that came along.

" You boys who take chances like that have got guts and ought to get on," he replied.

He pulled out his wallet and handed me a pound note.

" Here, take this for a start. Get it changed before play to-night and sit opposite me. You play until I

give you the wink to quit. Never be familiar with me at the table, but if you run out come to me. I'll see you don't lose on it. Get me? I'll see you after dinner."

He gave my shoulder a squeeze and left me. I went on deck. The passengers were waiting in groups for the gong to sound. With money in my pocket I decided not to risk the saloon again for meals, but to rely upon being able to buy some food from the bar or at the " shop ".

The " shop " was a place where anything could be bought, from a carnival balloon to a tin of biscuits. I felt like getting my teeth into a crust of bread and cheese, and jokingly asked the man at the " shop " if he had anything in that line. He took it seriously, and apparently thought I must be feeling seasick, for he said :

" Feeling groggy, sir ? I would advise a dose of my special preparation. It will settle the stomach, sir, and if you take plenty of biscuits and cheese after it you'll have no further trouble for the night."

In case I had to meet this man again I asked him to prepare a dose of his mixture. It was worth the shilling he charged me, because he gave me the most valuable information I received during the whole voyage.

" Don't take a cooked meal after this, sir, but go down at supper-time and eat as many biscuits as you can. If you do that the sickness won't bother you further."

I wanted to know more about this supper suggestion, so I said :

" I have turned in early each night, so I must have missed supper. What is it ? "

" Oh, it's quite an informal affair, sir," he explained. " The biscuits and cheese are put on a table, and anyone can take what they want and return to the deck. Many passengers don't bother, but I would advise you to try some to-night, so as to move your sickness. You can get it any time between nine-thirty and ten."

I thanked him for this information, and with the nineteen shillings change he had given me I moved off to a secluded corner, hoping that nine-thirty would come quickly. I sat alone for some time, but soon the passengers came on deck again. I made my way to the smoke-room to be sure of getting a seat at the card table. I saw the " dealer " coming along the deck. As he came up to me he said :

" Play for an hour, son, and when I give you the wink use the concert as an excuse for quitting."

He did not stop to talk, but passed on as if he had not noticed me. In the smoking-room the gamblers were getting settled down. I sat at an empty table, and looked for some sort of lead from my new friend. He gave me no sign of recognition as he and several more moved to the table.

As they were taking their seats one of them said :

" What's it to be ? Solo again ? "

" O.K. with me ! " said my friend. Then, turning to me, he said :

" Would you care to take a hand ? Or do you object to this vice ? "

" I'd like to play," I said. " What are the stakes ? "

" Six, nine, and a shilling," said one of the men, and I agreed. The highest I had ever played was

ha'penny " Solo ", penny " Bundle " and twopenny misere, but as I knew I would not lose I accepted without hesitation.

The cards were dealt out, and I received a poor hand. A " solo " call was made, and the call got home. Then my friend dealt ; and when I say " dealt " I mean it. I picked up a hand of hearts such as only gamblers dream of. He must have thought that a little demonstration of his powers might give me confidence, for if I had had any doubts beforehand this deal left me with no fear that he was not prepared to fulfil his part of the bargain.

I called " The Bundle " and got it home. It would have been clever play to have lost with such a hand ! With seven playing I had already earned a day's pay, so I expected to lose a little next time. With average luck from the deals of the others and a good " lift " now and again from my friend, I had won twelve shillings when I received the wink to quit.

I had decided to plead that I was booked for a turn at the concert, and so get away on friendly terms. No one made any objection to my leaving the " school ", and I went out on deck. Straight ahead from the smoking-room door passengers were looking over the railings to the deck below. I heard a piano being played, and could hear a man singing a comic song. I joined the crowd at the rails. Here I could enjoy the concert without running the risk of being spotted by the " Captain ", who no doubt would insist upon my doing " something ".

The " Captain " had made himself M.C., and a great success he was. I heard a lady say it was a

quarter to ten, so I hurried off to the saloon. It was the easiest thing in the world to get this supper. I found several plates of dry ship's biscuits and pieces of cheese unattended by stewards or anyone else. Two passengers were talking at one end of the table, but they were the only people in sight. The biscuits were too hard to eat quickly, so I filled my pockets with some and also took a few pieces of cheese, and went out again. I went along the alley which led to the blanket locker. I guessed that most people would be either in their cabins or at the concert, so that if the locker was to be my bedroom for the night now would be the best time to get in. All was quiet as I turned the corner, and I quickly had the rope unfastened and the door opened. Once in, I had plenty of time to fix the rope so that it held the door fast and looked as though it had not been touched. There were about two inches of space between the door and the side stanchion to which the rope was tied, so that by tying it loosely I could work the knot to the outside. To bring the door as close as it would come, I took a piece of wood from a shelf and wedged it behind the rope on the inside. This shortened the rope, and thus the door was held tight and did not swing with the rolling of the ship.

There was a space of about nine inches between the top of the door and the top of the locker, and through this space came enough air and light to make it comfortable. I found two bundles of blankets on a shelf, and used them all to make a bed. I felt safe as I lay back in the blankets and had my first meal of ship's biscuits.

With my belly filled with biscuits and cheese and

my body warm in the blankets I settled down for some hours of restful sleep.

When I awoke it was light. I could hear people walking about the deck. I went to the door to listen for the ship's bell and so learn the time. While I was near the door I realized that I should have to do something about the rope if I wanted to evade detection. As the locker was practically empty no one would be likely to visit it before our arrival, and if I could see to it that my entry was not noticed I would be safe for the rest of the journey. The one difficulty was the rope. If a sailor or a steward noticed any slackness they might fix it from the outside, and I would be locked in for days. I looked closely at the door. The rope passed through a hole about two inches in diameter, then round the stanchion at the side. So long as the coils appeared tight and the knot was on the outside there was no danger. So I thought of the plan of cutting the rope on the inside and tying a fake knot for the outside.

I got this idea from a tie I had seen worn by an old man. It was done up at the back and the knot in the front was permanent. Once the tie was fastened at the collar it was difficult to tell the difference between it and an ordinary tie which had to be knotted each time it was put on.

When I was inside the locker it was easy enough to draw the rope tight, but I found that from the outside I could not put my arm in far enough to draw the loop into position. So I passed a piece of string through the hole in the door, fastened it on the inside to a nail in the wall, and tied the other end to a strand in the knot. This had the effect of

keeping the door closed as tight as it would go, and at the same time held the knot close to the door. The loose ends hung down on the inside, and it looked just as if the rope was holding the door fast.

I looked at my handiwork from the bottom of the companion-way, and saw that all was well. Provided the string held it would only take me a few seconds to get inside the locker again.

I went to the toilet and had a good wash. Watching my chance, I picked up the first towel I saw, carried it off, and before the owner had a chance to miss it I had thrown it through the opening at the top of the locker door.

Once on deck, I walked to the side of the ship and enjoyed the strong breeze. This morning for the first time I heard the ship's bell. It struck " seven bells ", which meant that it was 7.30 a.m. Breakfast was at eight o'clock, and many passengers were taking sharp walks along the deck to create an appetite for it. I had the rest of my biscuits and a lump of cheese, and unless I found something more substantial at the " shop " I would have to make them do until supper-time.

On deck in the fresh air was the wrong place for me with only a little food in prospect. I began to develop a strong craving for some bacon and eggs and tea. Undoubtedly guided by my " belly consciousness ", I toyed with the idea of taking a chance in the saloon again, trying to think of a way of finding out if all the seats had been claimed at " my table ". I could hardly ask the steward that question, and unless he still regarded me as one of the " missing " I stood little chance of getting anything.

Help to make a decision came from the " Captain ". He was walking alone, and as he saw me he came over.

" Well, you let me down last night," he said. " I was banking on you to see me through."

" I'm sorry," I replied. " I didn't think you needed me. You made such a success of it with the others. Quite a ' promoter ' you are."

To my surprise the " Captain " fell for this bit of flattery. His eyes sparkled, and a broad smile stretched right across his face.

" Oh, perhaps it wasn't too bad, under the circumstances. I'm glad you enjoyed it. I did not see you, though. Where did you hide yourself ? "

I explained that I was watching from the top deck, and luckily for me he left it at that.

" Fifteen minutes till breakfast. Shall we walk ? " he suggested. Without giving me a chance to say yes or no he linked his arm in mine, and we began promenading with the others.

The fact that he had not mentioned anything about the empty chairs at the table gave me heart. If someone else had taken my chair he surely would have commented upon it. Instead, he said :

" Well, now you're up and fit we can expect you at table, eh ? "

" Oh, I almost feel ashamed to come now," I replied. " People will laugh at me for being sick so long."

" Oh no, my boy. You're not the only one. Why, I haven't seen our table full yet at any time, and at breakfast there are only two or three of us. Come down this morning, and see to it you make up for lost time."

In view of the good fortune I had had so far it would have seemed like insulting my guardian angels to show any lack of faith now. I remembered the steward's words : " It's unwise to go without food," and I decided that once again I would take a chance and go down for a meal.

I went in with the " Captain ", and was greeted with a smile from the steward.

" Feeling all right now, sir ? " he asked me.

" Thanks," I replied with a smile.

I was amazed at the luck I was having. I found myself wondering how many more were in like case. I had a hearty breakfast, and afterwards went out on deck. That morning I had a very difficult hurdle to jump. We had not been on deck half an hour when a steward came round telling us to prepare for " boat drill ". At the signal from the bridge—a blast from the ship's siren—all passengers were to muster at their respective lifeboats, taking a life-belt with them.

My heart sank. How was I to evade detection now ? If I were seen without a life-belt I would surely be questioned. Even if I could find a spare life-belt I did not know which boat to go to, for undoubtedly all the passengers would be counted and checked. My only hope was to get rid of the " Captain ", and take refuge in my locker until I could hear sounds indicating that the drill was over. I wished I knew on which side the " Captain's " boat was, because then I could easily say mine was on the opposite side. Several passengers were now on deck, some carrying their life-belts over their arms, others wearing them as though ready for a jump into the sea.

" We had better be ready," said the " Captain ". " So I'm off for my belt, and you'd better get yours."

He went down to his cabin, and I went down to my locker. At the bottom of the companion-way were several women struggling to get their belts over their heads. Woman-like, they would not be seen on deck until they were ready, so they had chosen the alley-way outside my locker for their " trying on " room.

As I was wondering what to do the siren gave several blasts. This made the women excited, and they started rushing around like mad cattle. The scene gave me some idea of what might happen if any real trouble arose. I fully agree with the opinion expressed by a ship's officer who had experienced a ship-wreck, that all excitable women should be shot in the interests of the safety of the others. That morning the women went everywhere except up the companion-way and on deck. Finally an officer had to stand at the top of the steps and call them up. I withdrew into the shadow under the steps and waited until all was quiet. Then, creeping over to my locker door, I untied the string and released the rope. Once inside, I took hold of the loose ends of the rope and pulled them tight. It was a long time before I heard any further movement. After a short blast from the siren I heard the passengers returning to their cabins to replace their belts. I waited for some time longer before I ventured to go out again. When I did I made my way to the smoking-room to see if I could meet my friend the " dealer ".

He was there, but was not playing. The excitement of the boat drill had upset the usual run of

things, and the men had not yet settled down. I did not play before lunch, neither did I go down to the saloon at lunch-time. In the afternoon I had a very lucky break. The old lady with whom I had had tea the day before saw me and invited me again to have a cup. I stayed and talked to her all the afternoon, and in the evening she asked me if I would mind walking with her so that she would have support if she became dizzy from the motion of the ship. Her request illustrated the selfishness of the average human being. This dear old lady contributed a great deal towards the general comfort of those around her, but when she needed a little help or a comforting word there were few who came forward to give it. She did not come on deck after dinner, so I was free to get away to the smoke-room for my daily gamble.

I had fitted in nicely with my surroundings. The mornings of the next few days I spent on deck with the " Captain ", the afternoons and evenings I spent with the old lady, and at night I was in the smoking-room. With drinks and sandwiches provided by the " Captain ", tea and biscuits from the old lady, and my regular visit to the saloon for supper biscuits, when I took enough for the following morning's meal, I managed to keep the wolf from the door without risking a further visit to the saloon.

One of the most entertaining hours I had on the boat was when the two " bright young things " and the " Captain " discussed pirates and stowaways. It was amusing to hear their different views regarding a stowaway. The " Captain " held that men only stowed away on a small tramp-steamer, maintaining

that the regulations were too strict for anyone to get aboard a liner like the one we were travelling on.

" Why, no man could live ten days without food or drink, so no man would be fool enough to chance it," he asserted.

" Well, it's a crying shame ! " declared the young woman. " We have had no real thrills on this boat as yet, and it looks as if we shan't have any. After all, why shouldn't we have some stowaways on board ? Other ships get them."

" Perhaps the men who stow away know of the conditions on this boat, and so keep away," returned her husband.

The explanation seemed to satisfy her, but she still thought she would like to see a stowaway to see what they looked like.

I did not dare to enter too far into this discussion for fear of making a slip, but I thought that if there was any likelihood of a cash value being attached to a stowaway I might let her into my secret. It was risky, and I should have to think it over well before I decided.

The last night of the voyage I decided to tell the young wife my secret. On the following day they would be landed and far away, so if she took a friendly view and promised silence I would give her my story. After all, I realized that it would be great fun for her to be the first to find out, and I was sure that once she was off the ship she would tell the " Captain ". And he was entitled to know, for it was his kindness which had made my successful voyage possible.

During the last evening I had the pleasure of

walking with the old lady, and found out that she was related to the young wife. She told me they were going " West " as far as Banff. The young woman joined us, and we three walked together. The conversation turned on what we were each going to do in the new country, and I had again to explain that my plans were indefinite. The old lady wished she knew of work for me, and told me she was acquainted with people in Banff who might be able to help. She even went so far as to write an address down, so that I could call if ever I got so far.

The young woman revealed great interest in me. Apparently she regarded a man going to a new land and not quite sure where he was going to stay as almost in the same category as a pirate or a stowaway. She wanted to know more of my story, and made me promise that we would talk alone after dinner. During dinner-time I had a hectic half-hour on deck. Things were moving fast. I wondered if she would talk at her table, and so make me an object of interest or even pity among other passengers. I almost wished that I had not agreed to talk. I decided that before I let her know of my position I would find out if she was likely to report me. If she was merely interested she would probably have all the more fun in keeping the secret until the party was on the train.

She was one of the first out of the saloon, and came straight up to me.

" Oh, I thought I would have been first," she said. " How did you get up here so quickly ? "

" I did not go in to dinner to-night," I replied.

She looked surprised.

" You aren't ill, are you ? " she inquired.

" No," I said. " But I didn't feel up to eating. I might go down at supper-time and have a biscuit or two."

" Do you like those biscuits ? " she asked. " I cannot eat them. They are as hard as dog biscuits. But I suppose when one has missed dinner one can eat anything."

" Yes," I replied. " They're substantial and quite nourishing. I suppose they would be handy to men who stow away too ; they last so long and they don't take up much room."

" Do you know anything about stowing away ? " she asked excitedly. " I would like to meet a stowaway ; it must be exciting."

" You hardly ever do meet them," I said cautiously. " You see, most of the world is against the man who is right down, and those fellows are careful who they trust."

" I suppose that's true," she said. " But it would be cruel to give anyone away, brutally cruel. I would sooner help one than do him any harm ; but I am never likely to meet one, so I shan't be able to help."

She looked at me.

" What a pity you could not have stowed away on this ship, then you would have had your passage money to spend on landing. It would be more than enough to keep you until you found work."

I almost laughed.

" Supposing I am a stowaway ! What would you think ? "

She looked excitedly at me.

" Why, I'd adore meeting you. I'd help to feed you, I'd do anything I could to help. So would ' Bobby '. But no, I would not tell anyone. I would keep it a secret to myself."

We had walked up and down for some time, and had now reached a spot out of earshot of anyone else.

" Have I your word that if I introduce you to a stowaway to-night you'll keep it a secret and try to help him ? " I asked.

" Yes, yes," she said breathlessly. " I promise. On my honour I promise. Can you show me him to-night ? "

" Certainly," I said. " You've been talking to one for nearly half an hour."

She looked aghast. First she went white, then she blushed deeply.

" You a stowaway ? Why, I can hardly believe it. We have seen you on deck every day. You would have been found out by now." She stopped short. " Is that why you didn't go in to dinner to-night ? "

" Yes ; I had no right to," I replied. " But don't get excited. Remember your promise."

" I can hardly believe it. But let's get away from here, and you can tell me all about it."

We walked to the upper deck, and I told her how and why I had come to be on the boat. I explained how I had managed during the voyage, and said that my next difficult task would be to get safely off the boat. As she had travelled before, she could tell me what the chances were of getting through the immigration and customs barriers without a passport or document of any description.

She told me it would be hopeless, but that she must find a way of getting me ashore. Before she decided to seek aid, however, she asked if she might see my locker and verify my story of the rope trick. We strolled down to the locker, and, as nobody was about, I slipped the string off the rope and we went inside. I pulled on the loose ends of the rope and showed her how I fixed it at night. The demonstration convinced her that my story was true, and she was so glad to have met a stowaway that she nearly danced for joy.

I had a queer feeling that perhaps I had made a huge mistake by letting her into my secret, but now I had told someone I felt more easy in my mind.

" Can I tell Bobby ? " she asked. " He is my husband, you know. I'm sure it will be all right. I think we ought to help in some way. Why, no one could have guessed you were not an ordinary passenger, and I'm sure the ' Captain ' would be surprised to hear the story."

I gave her a sharp look. " You remember the promise you gave, don't you ? "

" Oh, yes," she said. " You can trust me not to let you down. I think we ought to go up on deck now. Is it safe ? "

I listened for a moment, then untied the rope. When we were out I fixed the string, and we went on deck. At nine-thirty I went down for some biscuits and cheese and to load up with my last day's supplies. The exact time of our arrival in port was not yet known, but it was generally expected that all the passengers would be ashore by noon the next day. My problem was to think of a way of getting

off the boat without having to pass through any difficult channel. I could not think of anything, but made a decision not to attempt to get off until the day after our arrival. This meant that I should want an extra supply of biscuits and cheese, so that I could go into hiding for at least twenty-four hours.

I returned to the deck with my pockets full, and saw the young wife talking excitedly to her husband and the " Captain ". I was sorry for this. I had hoped the " Captain " would not know until it was too late for him to do anything, since I was not at all sure that his desire to be in the forefront of things would not impel him to give information to the bridge. Luckily for me, however, he was treating the news as if it were a huge joke. He was sure I had been leg-pulling, and was prepared to take my side and keep it up.

" We must find out what's best to be done," the woman's husband said seriously. " But we ought not to discuss it out here. I propose we adjourn to our cabin and try to get things straight."

" All right," said the " Captain ". " Let's go and arrange this dare-devil escape of the runaway convict." Slapping me on the back, he added : " But it's not as bad as that, is it ? " And he gave me a sly wink and whispered : " Leg puller."

I let him have his joke. I knew that the young woman would convince him sooner or later, and then the laugh would be on him. The young couple led the way, and, once established in the cabin, we all became serious. The " Captain " put me under a strong examination, and, at the end of it all, he made a scrutiny of the passenger list in order to test my

story. If I passed this test, he said he could almost guarantee my safe passage off the boat.

What story he told the purser I do not know, but within an hour he had the names and cabin numbers of those who should have sat at his table. In a few minutes he had checked the information, and found out that I was not on the passenger list. It was his turn to become serious.

" Will you be safe in your locker to-night ? " he asked.

I told him I saw no danger of being found out, since only the three of them knew it was my hiding-place.

" Well, my lad, your best plan is to stay on board until the ship moves from the quay we first tie up to. It will probably shift to the coal wharves. For a small sum you might get a gatekeeper to let you pass, or you might bribe a sailor to let you have his pass-out. It will only cost you a few dollars. Have you any money ? "

I told him I had thirty shillings, and he said :

" I'll change that into Dominion currency for you now. It's just about enough to get you out of the dock. Seven dollars and two bits I make it, so if I give you ten dollars it will mean a feed for you when you land on the outside of the dock."

" Is there any way we can help ? " asked the young man.

" Hardly," the " Captain " replied. " It would be better to let him find his own way out. His luck has held good so far, so he may do it yet. What we all could do, though, is for each of us to ask the steward to get us some sandwiches, and we could let him have them. They would help the biscuits

down, and then he won't come to harm even if he cannot get off the boat for a day or two."

It was agreed that this should be done, and that I was to collect them just before the ship went alongside, when of course I must go into hiding.

Then the " Captain " dropped a " bomb-shell ".

" It's more risky than I thought," he said. " The Customs may search the ship for contraband, and very likely go into your locker. You had better find a safer place than that to hide in."

I suggested that it might be wiser to spend the last night in the coal bunkers. After all, there must be plenty of room now, since most of the coal would have been used up. We agreed it would be a good plan for me to take my blankets and hide them in the bunker the following morning, and when the ship went alongside I would go down and await my chance to get ashore.

The young couple offered me some English money. But the " Captain " explained that dollars would be more useful, and he advised them to get change and let me have it in the morning. It was getting late, so the " Captain " and I left the cabin and went up on deck.

" Why didn't you tell me before ? " he asked. " I might have arranged something for you. Still, I'm glad you've come safely through so far. It was risky, but you'll find the risk worth it when you get ashore."

We walked together for half an hour, then he went below.

" I'll see you in the morning after breakfast," he said. " Keep cheerful. Good-night."

After he had gone I went to my locker and slipped inside. My last night on the ocean ! My last night in the locker ! In the morning one more hurdle to jump, and then I would be free. The excitement caused by the thought kept me awake for a long time. When daybreak did come at last I got up and went on deck. It was a bright morning. I had a feeling that everything would turn out well for me this day. My optimism over-shadowed the hardships of the last few weeks, and I felt that the future held no terrors for me and that I would find a home at last.

While I was enjoying the fresh morning my friend the " dealer " came up to me.

" Grand morning, eh ? " he said. " Just fine for arrival day. Everything will go smoothly, and we shall all be ashore now in no time. Do you take the train to-day ? " he asked.

I told him I had not yet decided what to do. My first task was to find out where I could go to, and then, if I had the fare, book my ticket.

" That's what I wanted to have a word with you for," he said. " You've played the game with me, so perhaps I can help you. How much did you win ? "

I told him I had ten dollars left.

" Oh, so you've got change quickly, eh ? You're wise, for it saves you hanging around waiting to get your cash changed. But I've only some English money and a few American dollars. Would you like to go ' West ' ? If so, these bills might pay your fare."

He handed me some U.S.A. money amounting to twenty-five dollars.

" If you take a ' Colonist ' ticket that should land you at Winnipeg. You ought to get a job in a day or two, so you will be in clover. I go to New York to-night. I find it more healthy there than on the prairie. I've had a good trip, and I hope you land a good job soon. To cross the ocean with nothing in your pocket as you have done entitles you to some good luck. Well, good-bye, in case we don't meet again." He held out his hand.

I tried to convey to him my grateful thanks for his help. I could not find words, but he understood.

" O.K., son ! I like a man who can give his word and stand by it. You did me a good turn by keeping quiet, and I hope we have both benefited."

With that he gave me a firm grip of the hand, one of his pleasant smiles, and strolled away. I shall always remember him. Crook as he was, he showed that he had a good heart and sympathy for those who were down but trying to rise. My hope is that he will read this himself, and know that I have not forgotten him who gave me a helping hand when I needed it. He may be surprised to read that I was a stowaway, but I'm sure he will have a good laugh.

The passengers were more than usually cheerful that morning, all excitement with saying good-bye to friends made on the boat, and the hurry of gathering things for the job of packing.

The breakfast gong went, and it was not until this meal was over that I set eyes upon the " Captain ". He came up to me all smiles.

" Come down to the cabin, my lad, and let's get things settled. We must be quick, or we shall be in before we know where we are. How do you feel ? "

I told him I felt fine, and followed him to the cabin. The couple were already there, and the lady was wrapping up sandwiches. They greeted me cheerfully. The young man said :

" We shall have some tea presently ; the steward said he could make some. How did you sleep ? "

I was going to answer, but his wife handed me some sandwiches on a plate.

" You must be famished," she said. " Eat these first, and you can talk afterwards."

A compromise was arrived at whereby I talked between mouthfuls. For an hour we talked, and at the end I received a large parcel of food, some chocolate, and ten Canadian dollars. I thought that as things were going I should be able to bribe my way right across the Continent, let alone out of dock.

They gave me some addresses which might be useful when looking for work if I went out " West ". I said good-bye to them in the cabin, then went in search of an opening through which I could gain entry to the coal bunkers.

My luck was not so good that morning ; the ship was alongside before I had found a hiding-place for my blankets. I wrapped my towel around my body, and decided to make the best of it without them.

The gangways were lowered to the quay-side, and the passengers went down and stood in groups around heaps of luggage. The crew were busily running about the deck with ropes, etc. I took my last look at daylight, and went to seek darkness for the next twenty-four hours.

I thought of the air shaft I had come down when I left the bunker, and for want of a better place I

made my way in search of the store-room. The side of the ship next the quay was crowded with people waiting their turn to go off the boat and pass the emigration officials. All along the rails they stood, watching the other passengers on the quay.

I had an idea which direction to take, and was soon going down the very steps which the sailor had come down the first morning I was on deck. I turned into the passage. It was deserted. I came to an iron door, and found it was the store-room. I had no need to creep about to-day. The door opposite was partly open ; I could see the platform I had crossed, and the vertical ladder running down to it. Some men in singlets and dungarees were moving about below, but no one seemed interested in what was going on up above. I stepped on to the platform and moved swiftly to the ladder. The ship was still now, so that walking was easy, and I was also able to speedily climb the ladder. The air was not so hot to-day as it had been the morning I came down the shaft, and when I arrived at the opening to the bunker the air was fresher.

I climbed through the hole, and found I had a bigger drop now, because all the coal had been removed.

I stood and listened.

All was quiet in the bunker, but the sound of footsteps above could be faintly heard. I felt comfortable, knowing I had a good supply of food, and the feel of the dollars in my pocket gave me great satisfaction. It was about noon when I got into the bunker, so I reckoned I had to face up to a long time in the dark before I could venture to go on deck again.

The time was not so long as I anticipated, for after some hours of silence I heard knocking above my head, and suddenly a beam of light shot down. In a flash I realized that the hatchways were being removed. This was serious, for it meant that I should have to search for a better hiding place. I drew into the shadow, and awaited developments.

One hatch was opened, and after a brief silence I heard knocking some distance away. More light shot into the bunker. It was far more comfortable now the total blackness had gone, but with the greater comfort came the increased danger of being found. From where I was I could hear many footsteps overhead. There was much running about, and now and again I heard sharp words of command. A loud blast from the siren was answered by the shrill whistle of some river craft, and then, to my surprise, the engines started throbbing.

I felt the ship move, and realized that she had " cast off ". I went cautiously towards a hatchway, hoping to find a way of getting on deck without being seen.

I reasoned that now the ship was leaving the quay there was little danger of being found by the dock officials, and thought that if I could get an empty cabin I might be as safe there as anywhere else. I could hear no sound of people moving about now, so I crept slowly up the vertical ladder and peeped over the top of the hatchway. The ship was in mid-stream and moving slowly. The sun was setting, so I decided to wait until dusk before making any attempt to get out of the bunker. I went down the

ladder again, and walked up and down in the semi-darkness close to the hatchway.

When I was ready to have another look at the deck, for some reason I went to the other hatchway to climb the ladder. A new scene presented itself. Straight in front of me was the crew's fo'castle. Some men were sitting around, smoking. Most of them were wearing singlets and dungarees and " sweat-rags " tied loosely round their necks. I saw the pump from which I had had a drink the day I boarded the boat, and I had quite a thrill when I caught sight of the very boy who gave me the jug.

I remembered the " Captain's " advice regarding the purchase of a " pass out " from one of the crew. If this lad was not too vindictive about the jug episode he might be willing to co-operate with me for a few dollars. My next job was to get in touch with the boy. If I had known a ship's crew as I know them now I should have walked up to the first man I saw and put my proposition to him. Instead, I gave myself an hour or two of anxiety trying to catch the boy's eye without being seen by anyone else. There was further blowing of whistles and sirens, some sharp orders were shouted, then something happened which eased my mind greatly. Most of the men who were standing around moved to the side of the ship and watched as the boat was manœuvred to its new berth.

I intended to go over to the fo'castle and get a word with the boy, but he was a thought ahead of me. His eyes rested on me, and fixed in a stare. He was obviously puzzled. Luckily he did not make a fuss, but came over to investigate. I did not know

whether to run and hide or face him and ask for his help. He made my mind up for me.

" Hello, mate, are you lost ? " he asked quietly.

" No," I whispered back, " but will you come down here and have a talk ? "

He gave me a queer look, hesitated a moment, then came down into the bunker.

" Would you like to earn an easy five dollars ? " I asked.

" Can a bleeding duck swim ? " he said in great surprise. " How ? " he went on as if by an afterthought.

I then confessed that I had stowed away, and wanted to get a pass ashore.

" You stowed away on this tub ? " he said. " Blimey ! Where were you and how did you live ? "

He appeared amazed and even a little doubtful, so I thought that if I could remind him of the jug incident he might be convinced of my story. When I told him a look of surprise appeared on his face.

" You perisher ! " he said. " The store-keeper raised hell with me for losing that jug, and he reckons he's going to ' dock ' a half dollar from my pay. You're a lucky bastard, though. It's done you a good turn. You won't get me into trouble if I let you have my pass ? "

I assured him that I would be careful to avoid that.

" It's easy enough," he said, " but I doubt if I can get one to-night. I know I shall have one in the morning, because the engineers will be sure to want some beer. If I lose the pass the mate can make out another. How much did we agree on ? "

I told him five dollars, but as he stood a chance of losing another half-dollar for the jug I would make it six dollars.

" Six dollars ! " he whistled. " That's more than my old man lets me spend after a month's work. Six dollars for a pass out ! Blimey, you don't want a dozen do you ? "

I was overjoyed at my success, and handed the money over to him, asking him to bring the pass as soon as he could on the following day.

" Where the hell are you going to ' flop ' to-night ? " he said. " And where do you keep your grub ? "

I told him I was without food, and had not yet decided where to sleep the night.

He gave another look at the money in his hand. " Blimey, I throw away enough grub every day to feed a dozen. You wait here a bit. I'll go and rob the ' Black Pan ' and bring it to you."

He went off, and within a quarter of an hour was back with a can of hot coffee and a parcel of food.

" This lot will keep you fit till morning, and I'll save you some breakfast. Where are you going to ' kip ' ? "

I told him I might find an empty cabin, or might even take another chance in the blanket locker.

" Well, you see to that and I'll have some grub for you. You must be ready to get off quick, for I shall have to get another pass before ten o'clock or else the mate will make me wait till the afternoon. Well, good-night mate, and don't tell no-one."

I gripped his hand and said : " I won't, and I hope you won't."

" Not bleeding likely," he said, and went back to the fo'castle.

It was quite dark now, and I risked going on deck, working my way round to the locker. To my dismay I found the door wide open. I dared not sleep there that night, so I went to the cabins, entered one, and lay down. Sleep was out of the question, for my brain was too active, and I was excited because of my safe crossing. I recalled every minute of the time since I had left London, and thought that all the hardships and anxiety I had gone through were well compensated by my great luck in getting safely across.

I had very little sleep that night, and at daybreak I got up and had a wash at the wash-basin in the cabin. Then I went on deck, finding very few of the crew about. I waited until I saw the boy and caught his eye. He gave a cautious look around, then came up to me.

" You'd better come into the fo'castle and get in my ' cart,' " he said. " No-one in there will take any notice of you."

I found that his " cart " was his bunk, and I lay in it while he busied himself getting breakfast for the firemen who were going on the next watch. He handed me a cup of tea and a slice of bread and butter, and told me I should have breakfast soon. A man in the next bunk to me looked up at me and then at the boy.

" Ho, Billy boy, so you've started in the hotel racket, eh ? Who's your pal ? "

" Mind your own bloody business," my friend replied. " Can't I help a man what's down if I want to ? "

" You sure can, Billy, and what's more it's your

duty to your fellow man to do all you can. Only don't be selfish about it, you're not the only philanthropist on this boat. Can I help ? "

" Yes," he was assured. " You can help by holding your bloody noise and waiting for your breakfast. If I give your grub to him you can have mine when I get it from the galley."

" That's O.K. with me, Billy boy," said the man. " Let him have mine right away." Turning to me he said : " On the beach, fellah ? "

I looked surprised. Not knowing what he meant I did not know what to answer. Before I had got over my embarrassment the boy whispered into the man's ear. It worked wonders. The man sat up and leaned over to me.

" Don't be scared, mate ! You're as safe as the Bank of England in here, and we'll see you safely ashore."

His cheery words gave me great hope, and I felt happier than I had done for many a month. He was full of ideas. He pointed out that if I was going ashore on a pass made out to a fo'castle boy it would be fatal to go out as if dressed for church. He produced an old pair of overalls and a blue linen cap, then went over to another bunker and whispered to its occupant. Both of them came back to me, bringing with them a blue jacket which matched the overalls. These went over my clothes well, and there was no sign of bulkiness. The boy had gone away, but soon came back and handed me a pass.

" Who is on the gangway ? " asked the man who had come over with the jacket.

" Liverpool Mike," said the boy.

" That's O.K.," said the man. " I'll go and talk to him so that you'll get a clean break-away from the boat. Once on the quay you'll have no bother so long as you don't lose the pass out of the dock."

He went away. When he returned he told me that if I waited for half an hour the officer would be at breakfast, and he could guarantee a safe passage off the ship.

For the next half-hour we talked about what I should do when I got ashore. Just before I left, the man who had first spoken to " Billy " handed me some little books, remarking :

" Read them, Buddy, and I hope they'll help you."

I put them in my pocket, and, after a last hand-shake all round, I went to the gangway.

" Good luck, son," whispered the man at the top of the gangway. I walked down the many steps, and set foot upon Canadian soil.

I had been given good directions, and found the gate with ease. A rather stout old man in uniform was sitting in a box at the gate, and as I approached he got up and asked for my pass. He looked it over and returned it to me, saying, " O.K."

I passed through the gate. A strange man in a strange land ! I wanted to collect my thoughts, so I looked for a café where I could sit over a cup of tea and decide what I should do next.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

I FOUND a café and had my introduction to the seating system of America, which is now being adopted in the London snack-bars. I sat on a stool at the counter, ordered a coffee, and had some apple pie. The man who served me proved to be a very sociable chap. Trade was slack, so he had plenty of time for talk. I paid with a dollar bill, and looked curiously at the coins I received in change.

" Yer change O.K. ? " he asked.

" Well, I expect so," I replied. " But I'm new to the country, and I don't know this money."

He leaned across the counter and showed me the different coins in use in Canada. I found it easy to count them once I had mastered their values, but as some nickels were about the same size as 25 cent pieces I had to keep my eyes skinned when I received change. I was grateful for the information this man gave me, and I had a long talk with him regarding ways of going " West ".

" If you want to go cheap," he said, " just go down the yard and ' beat a freight.' "

He must have noticed my bewilderment, for he said, " Oh hec, you won't know my talk. What you want to do is to go to the station yards, and when you see a train leaving jump on it and hang on until it stops, and then get into one of the empty ' box cars '. I wouldn't advise a passenger train until you've had a little more experience. The best time

is at night, but there's always trains pulling out every day at all hours."

I thanked him for his advice, and asked him how I would find the railroad yards.

" If you hang about a bit there's sure to be some ' bums ' who'll put you wise. I'll grab one and put him on to you."

I moved from the stool and went to one of the tables at the far end of the café. The tables were set for meals, but I was not ready for dinner yet. To occupy my mind I took out the little books I had had given me in the ship's fo'castle. I found they were published by the organization known as the " Industrial Workers of the World ".

One was a song-book, and I enjoyed reading the songs, for they expressed in verse the same feelings that moved me. Every line of these songs shouted revolt against tyranny and oppression. I felt at once that whoever wrote them must have suffered as I had suffered, and as thousands more were now suffering. I got absorbed in this little red song-book, and did not notice the café filling up with people wanting a meal. I decided to have a meal also, for I did not want to walk around town and chance making a slip which would land me back in Britain.

A waitress had now come upon the scene, and I gave her my order. While she was away two men who had been talking to the man behind the counter came up and took a seat at the table. One nodded to me and said :

" Hello Pard, how's it going ? "

I told him things were going all right with me, and hoped they were with him.

" Just over from the ' Old Country ' ? " he asked, and I nodded.

" Big Bill over there was telling me you wanted to beat it West," he went on. " Where do you figure on hitting ? "

" I've got no idea where to go to, but if I can get to the ' middle west ' I might find something to do," I replied.

" Oh, sure, you ought to find something around Winnipeg," he said. " But you're a hell of a long way from that burgh right now. Do you know that you are more than two thousand miles away from the ' Peg ' ? "

I had not realized the vastness of the distance until then. Two thousand miles seemed an impossible stretch when I was used to walking only twenty miles a day.

" It's a long way," I admitted. " How can I get there ? "

" Well," he replied. " There are several ways. You can pay for your fare if you have it, walk if you don't want to get there quickly, or take a freight or passenger without paying your fare. I'm going to Monkton to-night in the ' blind baggage ', and if you like to chance it I'll be pleased to show you how. It's only about three hours' journey, and then perhaps you can get a freight going west. What do you say ? "

I accepted at once. I would take any chance which opened a way into the country. We all went out together, but when the time came to go to the " yards " only my friend came with me. I heard the loud clanging of a bell, and my friend said to me :

" That's ours for to-night. Come on, we go this way."

He led me behind some trucks which he called " box cars ", and we waited. On the other side of the cars I could see a passenger train ready to start. At the first shrill whistle from the engine and the first clang of its bell we ran towards the train. We had chosen the opposite side to the platform, and were able to jump on to the back end of the engine without being seen. The train was picking up speed as my friend showed me how to get into the " Blind ". At each end of the coach is a curtained-off part which is used for passing from one coach to another on a corridor train. This is known as the " Blind ". The " Blind " facing the back end of the engine is unused, and so provides a small space which affords a good foothold and good protection from the wind.

The train was going very fast now, and I had to hold on tight to prevent myself being swung off as the coach swayed. While the train was moving we could talk by shouting to each other, but when we were in a station we kept as quiet as mice. My friend told me that many who travel the " Blind " jump off at every station to avoid being caught. But he never would, because, he explained, it was even more risky to keep jumping off and so expose himself, and at the same time there was the risk of a fall every time you jumped on. He also added what I found to be a real piece of logic. As the railroad police knew that most men jumped off at all stations, they did not always trouble to inspect the " Blind ".

We arrived at Monkton safely, jumping off as the train slowed down at the points outside the yards. A short, sharp walk brought us into the town, and we went into a café for refreshment. My friend told me he was not leaving for a day or two, but if I wanted to press ahead he would see me into a freight going out that night.

The next part of my journey was much slower but less dangerous. We first went to the " Round House " where the engines are cleaned, and had a look at a chart on the wall. From this chart my friend was able to tell when the next freights were going out. We only had an hour to wait, so he led me to the far end of the yards, where several trains were being made up. Many of the " box cars " were closed and sealed, but eventually we came across a large empty one. The sliding door at the side was closed, but with a little exertion we opened it far enough to allow a man to get in.

We went off the track and hid behind a pile of railway sleepers which my friend told me were known as ties. The hour went by quickly, for he related some interesting stories of tramp life in Canada and America.

At last an engine passed by on another track, puffing loudly in time with the clanging of its bell. A man who is known as a " brakey " passed along the top of the train, signalling to someone as he went.

" You ought to wait for the ' High Ball ',' said my friend. " But as you've had no experience in ' jumping ' you'd better take a chance now."

I went over to the box car and climbed in. In a few minutes I heard the engine whistle the " High

Ball ", and immediately I heard a clanging noise approaching me. Bang, bang, bang, it went, getting nearer and louder every second. It ended only with a sudden jerk of the box car I was in, and I was thrown to the floor. The train had started. I scrambled to my feet and looked out of the car for my friend. He was waving good-bye to me.

He had told me to keep to this car until it reached its destination. He explained that at about every hundred miles was a " section station ". At these stations the engines are changed and there is often a long wait, which allows time to go into the town to get food.

Before the train had got many miles out of Monkton I had company. I saw a man jump a fence as we passed and swing on to the iron ladder to be found on every car. I lost sight of him for the time being, but later, when the train stopped for water, he left the ladder and came into the box car.

" How do, pal ? How's things ? " he greeted me as he slipped a haversack off his shoulder and dropped it to the floor.

" That bloody wind cuts to-night," he said. " I had half a mind to let her go away back there. Where are you making for, Bo ? "

I told him I was making the " Peg ". He smiled broadly.

" I kind o' figure you're strange in these parts. That speech of yours ain't developed out of ' riding the rods '. Out from the old country ? "

I told him my story, and he was all sympathy.

" You've got a pile in front of you, pal, but you

can make it if you stick. Did you see anyone else on the train ? "

I told him I had not, and that the only man I had met was the friend who showed me how to get into the car.

" I guess you'll be as good company as anyone else, so if you like I'll stay with you to the ' Mount '. Montreal you might know it by."

I accepted his offer, and inwardly hoped that he would renew it later so that we might go west together. It was not to be. It took us two days to make Montreal, because we were held up at one section by the presence of railway " Bulls ", who prevented our getting on to a freight. A " Bull ", I learned, is a policeman. The journey to Montreal was rather disappointing. When you take such a chance as stealing into a new country and then illegally riding trains, you expect it to be a little difficult. All the way to Montreal the only incident which brought home to me that I was doing wrong was when we lost our train. I remarked about this to my new friend, and he said :

" Sure, kid, you got beginner's luck. But don't let it get you slack. A sharp eye for the ' Bull ' is always necessary."

In Montreal I found a city in which I could move around without fear of detection. I still had some money left, so I decided to stay here for a day or two to see if I could get anything to do. My train friend took me to a " Chink " shop, where I could get food and a bed. We had a meal and I booked a bed, but he said he had other things to do. With a wave of the hand and a cheery " Good-bye, pal ",

he passed out of my life as suddenly as he had come into it. I was much richer in knowledge how to act now, thanks to his two days' companionship.

I went to bed early that night, and was up early next morning, for I had been put wise to a trick which anyone could play once or twice but not often. At that time it was the custom of the railway companies to ship men up country to the various works they had in hand. As a precaution against abuse of this free travel the company took a man's " baggage " as security for his good faith. He would not see his baggage again until he had arrived at the job.

As I had a few dollars it was easy for me to buy a cheap grip and fill it up so that it weighed fairly heavy. I applied for a job, got it, and was told to ship my baggage overnight. I deposited my grip and received a pass to go to Minaki, just over one hundred miles from Winnipeg. Some fifty men were all going to the same place, so I was not lonely. There were twenty men in my coach. During the day we sat at tables, and at night some slept upon the seats, while others used the " bunks " provided overhead. For forty-eight hours we travelled. Many complaints were made that we were not travelling by the fast train, but everyone seemed to settle down after the first night.

The novelty of the situation appealed to me. After much anxiety as to whether I would ever see the prairie at all, I was speeding West in comparative comfort. The long hours were passed in card-playing and story-telling. Poker seemed to be the

favourite game, and I saw that it was not for my limited exchequer.

Most of the men were of the navvy type. There was hardly a country in the world not represented in the gang. The majority appeared to have spent a hard life struggling with nature in the raw. On this train I realized the good nature of the migrating worker. Many had a soft, benevolent expression in their eyes, but all of them were well practised in hard swearing. I came in for a good deal of leg-pulling, but I was resolved not to take offence. This was appreciated by a couple of men who at night slept on a seat below me. As I was getting ready for bed the second night, one of them referred to my " newness " at the game.

" What do you think of Canada now ? " he asked. " Don't you wish you were away back home ? "

" No," I said. " I know from experience that ' back home ' is no place for anyone out of work."

" Oh, you'll get plenty of rest here. But by Christ, you'll get plenty of hard graft as well. How do you like the Canadians ? "

" I haven't met many," I replied. " But those I have seem quite all right."

" Sure they're all right, as long as you don't upset 'em. Are you game for a bit of free advice ? "

" Certainly," I said.

" Well, in case we don't meet again after this rattler has dumped us, let me give you a plan to follow and I guess you won't go wrong. Forget you were even an Englishman right now, and for the next twelve months stay quiet and watch things, and after that become a ' hundred per cent.' Canadian. Don't

ever talk about how things are done ' back home ', and remember you're in a new country which is run on new lines."

I didn't get the point of his advice then, but I soon found out that it was sound. He went on to advise me to go farther west without stopping at the job, and laughed heartily when I told him what I had done regarding my luggage.

" You're not the only one, pal. I guess half of this crowd will take the freight to the ' Peg ' as soon as one's ready."

We arrived at Minaki in the afternoon, and were to go to the job next morning. The gang got off the train, and, as if we were guided by the same mind, we all went straight into a café and ordered meals. The word went round among those who did not intend to stay at the job that four freights were in the yards.

I decided to follow the crowd as far as the yard, but to take my own course from then on. But this I found difficult. That night it appeared as if all the hoboes in the Dominion were waiting to board the train. As I approached the empty box cars a man came up and said :

" What are you riding on, Buddy ? "

" I don't understand you," I replied. " But I was taking this train, as I suppose you are."

" Sure I'm taking this train all right, but maybe you ain't unless you carry a card."

The situation was eased somewhat when someone behind me said :

" O.K., fellow worker, he's a ' limey ' just out here. I'll stand for him till to-morrow."

" O.K. with me," said the first man. " If you've travelled forty-eight hours with him and not lined him up, you must be laying down on the job."

The conversation had me beat for some time. The man who had stood for me said to me :

" You keep near me, kid, and get in the same box car as I do. I'll let you know why so soon as I can."

This left me still more puzzled, but I thought it best to await developments. The engine went up to the " head end ", and soon after the " high ball " sounded. At the signal some hundred men came out of hiding and boarded various parts of the train. I felt a tug at my arm, and saw it was my friend of the previous train.

" Over here ! " he yelled, and I went with him. Going across I saw the man who had told me to be near him also coming our way. The train started before I got aboard. It did not seem to worry the others, but I found it difficult to get on to a moving train, in spite of the fact that it was only travelling slowly. I managed, however, and received the congratulations of the two men with whom I had come in contact. We three sat down in one corner, and someone produced a candle and lit it. Within a minute several candles were lighted, and it was possible to see across the car.

The train had picked up speed by now, and the silence of the night was only broken by the bump, bump, as the wheels passed over the joints in the tracks. Some of the men stretched themselves flat on the floor, while others sat with their backs against the side of the car. A man started singing. Soon the box car was filled with melody.

The air was " When you wore a Tulip ", but the words were unfamiliar. One of my friends pulled out a book and handed it to me.

" Did you ever see one of these before ? " he asked.

" Yes," I replied. " I've got one." I took out the song-book I had been given on the boat.

" Good," said he. " Then join in, and you can tell me later where you got it from."

For over an hour the singing went on. We sang " Casey Jones ", " Allelujah I'm a Bum ", " Are you poor, forlorn and hungry ? " and a host of others. When the singing had died away, some went to sleep while others talked quietly. I was asked how I got hold of the red song-book, and told them about the boat and how I had crossed. The man who had helped me listened without saying a word, but when I had finished he asked me if anyone had talked " union " to me. I assured him that no one had, so he introduced me to the " I.W.W. Preamble ". I learned that the I.W.W. was an organization of workers on the basis of Industrial Unionism. I was told of the history and traditions of the union, and I felt strongly drawn towards becoming a member. In Canada most of the members were of the " migratory " workers' class, and the fair conditions in some parts of the country were entirely due to the effective organizational work of the I.W.W.

This union has met with opposition from all governments, masters, and trade unions. Its methods of activity were militant in the extreme. Many slanderous statements are made against the I.W.W. ; but my experience is that under all circumstances the members can be relied upon to

act as men. By the time my friend had finished telling me of the aims and objects of this union I was perfectly convinced that, as a migratory worker or hobo, my place was inside it.

It cost me two dollars to join the next morning, and I was given a button to wear so that I would be recognized as a " Wobblie ".

It was still early morning when the train slowed down outside the yards of Transcona for the " brakey " to attend to the points. I jumped in my turn, and fell to my knees. As I was rising I heard some shouting, looked round, and saw two " bulls " stretched out flat on their backs. The men made off the track towards the roadway, and I followed. I gave one glance back at the two " bulls " scrambling to their feet, and felt glad that I was " organized ".

There are many fights between railway " bulls " and hoboes when the " bulls " try to make arrests for " stealing a ride ". Sometimes the " bulls " win, but usually the hoboes come off best because of their numbers.

During my first visit to Canada I roamed between the " Peg " and Vancouver for two years, and found that there were plenty of thrills and danger, and also much humour. I was once caught riding a freight into Revelstoke, British Columbia, and the railway " bull " eventually handed me over to the town police. The station sergeant was an Englishman and had pity on me. Instead of going to jail I was given the job of looking after the drunks and seeing that they were ready for the judge in the morning. It was winter time, and I put in a cushy month while

others were facing the terrors of the Rockies at a temperature about thirty degrees below zero.

I had an amusing experience with a " bull " at Canova, Saskatchewan. I and two others had been caught riding the " blind baggage " of a passenger train. When we were being questioned at the police station the sergeant wanted to know our religion. We all said we had none. But he would not accept this as an answer, so I suggested that he should put down " agnostic ". The sergeant looked puzzled, and he obviously thought I was leg-pulling.

" What the hell is that ? " he asked.

" An agnostic," I explained, " is one who neither affirms nor denies the existence of a Creator."

He didn't seem pleased with my explanation, but let it pass, and we were taken to the cells. While we were eating our supper he came down and shouted to us from the grid :

" Hey, you fellows ! You were right. I got it here in this dictionary." He called me over to read almost word for word what I had told him.

" Well, what about it ? " asked one of my companions.

The sergeant gave a pleasant smile and said :

" Well, I guess I'm one of them things, too."

With its forests and valleys the Rocky Mountains district is beautiful in the summer, but it is brutal in the winter. At this season one year I was going west from Calgary Alta. I had almost missed my freight, and had to take the back end of the engine or stay behind. It was cold when I started, but before I had gone far it began to snow. I tried to get inside the tool box, but there was no room, and I did not

dare to jump off because I could not see where I would land, and everything was so slippery that it was too dangerous to try. So I had to stick it. The train rattled along through the bitter snow and wind, and I felt first my shirt, then my jacket and trousers go as stiff as boards. When the train stopped for water I was found by the fireman, and he got me into the engine cabin and thawed me out. That night was a rough night altogether for me, for I got stranded at Field, British Columbia, a place very hard to get out of, and notorious for its " tough judges ".

The fireman and engineer helped me off the train, and I made the town all right. But because of the snow I could not find the yards in time to get out on the next freight. I had a five hours' wait for the next train, and nowhere to go except to the station. To be seen there would involve awkward questions, and probably lead to my being thrown in the " Can ". My only hope of keeping warm was to walk along the track and hope to find shelter before my strength gave out. After about an hour's walk I saw a light in a shed just off the track. I shouted, and in answer a door opened and a shout came back to me. I made as straight as I could for the hut. To my great surprise I found that the occupants were a Red Indian and his squaw. Without questions they called me in and closed the door. The hut was heated by a stove burning logs of wood. Before either of them spoke they gave me coffee. I wanted to sit near the fire because it was so comforting, but the Indian waved his hand.

" Keep off bloody hot hell yas," he said. " You skin alive if too hot hur ? "

I could not talk much to them, for I found it difficult to understand what they said. But although they had the same difficulty with my speech they showed that they understood my predicament, by seeing to my comfort.

" You take train hur ? " asked the Indian.

I nodded my head, and he said :

" You sleep, I watch."

The woman handed me a fur coat to wrap around me, and I lay on the floor. As I glanced around the hut I could tell that the occupant was one of the many Indians who had come off the reservation and was " getting by " with trapping and hunting. On the floor near me were traps and lines and snow shoes. The squaw could not say much to me, but spoke in an undertone to her Indian. It was fine to see the spirit of friendship and sympathy shown by these two " outcasts " towards a stranger.

The Indian looked down at me and said : " You sleep." I closed my eyes and fell asleep.

I was awakened by a shake of the shoulder. " Train come," he said. I sat up. In the distance I could hear the puffing of an engine as it struggled with its heavy load along the slippery track.

" Soon bye and bye," said the Indian, as he handed me a bowl of coffee and some biscuits. He was right. It was fully twenty minutes before the train came in sight, and it was travelling slowly. There was a slight incline on the track, enough to create difficulties for a train on a morning such as that. This was my good fortune, for at the pace it was moving I had time to choose my box car and get safely in. I said good-bye to the couple in the hut,

and they waved back. I could not take my eyes off that hut. My mind went back to England, where the churches take collections to help to " Christianize " these alleged heathens ! And I thought that the churches would do more good by using the money in " Christianizing " their own congregations first, as then they might see that the " heathens " have been Christians in spirit all the time.

There are times when a hobo needs a rest from his travels, but often it is hard to find a suitable place or the cash to make it possible. I was in such a situation one time in Vancouver. I had to get through two months before I crossed the border into the U.S.A. I wanted to stay west, but I did not see how it was to be done. The solution came in rather a curious way. One night I paid for my bed at a large lodging house. The next morning after breakfast I went out into Vancouver. I was feeling irritated about something, and felt peevish with everybody. In this state of mind I returned to the lodging house to get a meal. At the door I was faced with a group of city officials, who were checking up on all who had stayed at the house the previous night. They told me that I must be vaccinated, because some cases of small-pox had been traced to this house. If I had been asked civilly I might have agreed quickly, but since they said I had " got " to be done, I flatly refused.

Before I knew where I was I found myself locked in a small room, and I was told that I could choose between vaccination and a trip to the isolation hospital until they could tell whether I had caught

the infection or not. Stubbornly I refused to be vaccinated, and was removed to the hospital. The spots arrived, I spent a comfortable six weeks in hospital, and came out fit to carry on with my journey south. Such luck is not to be expected all the time, but it is helpful to get a break now and then.

Riding the freights is much the same in Canada and the U.S.A., and it gets pretty monotonous except for the " high spots ". It is difficult to cross the border by train, because of the Immigration Department. Officials keep a sharp look-out, but with a little discomfort and the aid of one of the train crew it can be done. My first trip from Vancouver to Seattle, Washington, was with the help of one of the dining room staff who, at the critical point on the border, hid me in the ice-box. It cost me ten dollars and a cool half-hour, but it was worth it.

CHAPTER TWELVE

My travels through the U.S.A. and South America taught me much, and the knowledge I gained there proved useful in getting a Hoboes' Union going in Britain. Much has been written of the hobo life in America, and I may later write of my experiences there, but for the time being I must close my story with a description of the tramps' present conditions in Britain.

Crossing the Atlantic in a small steamer, I landed at Liverpool. I at once set to work to find out if any change had been made in the tramps' manner of life. The only difference I found was that there were more tramps on the road, and that most of them were between the ages of sixteen and forty.

Making my way to London by way of many of the casual wards I had formerly used, I tested the feeling of the men I met, with a view to seeing if they would respond to a call to organize. I found that most of the older tramps were willing and ready to do something to ease the terrible hardships of a tramp's life, but the younger ones had been thoroughly demoralized by soup kitchens and charity.

The real tramp will not submit to the " bread line " level of existence. He would rather steal for a living than become a soup scrounger. It was a pitiful sight to see so many young men and boys

being trained to live upon bread and margarine and soup. The amazing thing was that few of the young lads thought for a moment that things were not as they should be. They had no ideas about the future, and simply used all their energy in adapting themselves to a life of begging and scrounging. It was clear that an appeal to the youth to organize was out of the question ; so all our efforts were directed towards the older men.

In the spring of 1930 a meeting of hoboes was called to discuss the best way of forming an organization strong enough to press the authorities to do something about the distressing poverty on the roads. Many smaller meetings had been held to test the feelings of the men before this larger meeting was called. It took place on the grass in Hyde Park. Only about two hundred and fifty men turned up, but it was agreed that a start should be made. We formed a committee of twenty-five men, who were instructed to get out some sort of programme with which we would appeal to the homeless to organize in their own interests. I was elected " Organizer ", and found that for the first month it also meant that I was the Secretary, Treasurer, speaker, and, in fact, head cook and bottle washer of the union.

We held meetings in various towns, and came to the conclusion that the general public was dead against the tramp and had no intention of supporting him. This gave us the first real plank to our platform. We agreed that, since society ignored our claim to a decent standard of life, we were not bound by any law or convention laid down for its conduct.

For six years now the " Hoboes' Union ", which eventually became known as the " National League for the Abolition of Vagrancy ", has waged a fight on behalf not only of the " Knights of the Road ", but of all homeless poor persons. The work of the League had to be divided into two sections. One dealt with the development of the idea of " Fellowship on the road " ; and the other dealt with appeal to the public to take notice of the frauds and exploitation going on around them.

Our most interesting activities were the " Tramps' Conferences " held up and down the country. We would meet at an appointed spot and time, and enjoy ourselves singing and talking about the future of the League.

That some people took our union seriously is evident from the following anecdote.

A conference was being held on the moors just outside Sheffield, and we had invited men from that city to spend the day with us. A group of socialists and communists came out also, and after singing we all " drummed up " and prepared for the " business meeting ". One of the communists asked permission to speak to us.

" You chaps want a real leadership, and if you like we will lead you," he began. He went on to talk of various forms of organization, and explained an elaborate plan by which year after year we could meet and elect officials and build up an organization under their direction. When discussion time came an old tramp of over seventy said :

" Those ideas may sound good to you city folk, but I thought we had gathered here to make

plans to abolish vagrancy, while you have come to tell us how we are to put up with it for years to come."

Some communists and socialists discuss extraordinary subjects when invited to a conference. I remember one we held on Putney Heath to decide how we could get the people of London to take action against the filthy charity shelters. Several people asked if they might come along and help. As we are non-party we raised no objection, but, instead of helping us to solve our pressing problem, one talked of the theory of Dialectical Materialism, and another appealed to us to take our hands off the Chinese. Exactly what they thought they were getting at has puzzled me ever since.

Not only politicians, but many London church ministers tried to make use of our organization. One minister asked me to visit various churches to speak on the problem of the destitute. He even encouraged me not to " hold my punches ", but to hit out. I did so, pleasing some church people and disturbing others. As I was not paid to speak I was free to say what I thought, and what I knew to be true. And I cared little of what people thought about me. But one day I was talking to a man who had attended one of the meetings. In the course of conversation he showed me a letter he had received from the minister, asking for money to help fight the dangerous teachings spread by the " Tramps' Union ". It would be hard to find a worse graft. To send a man to speak, knowing that what he says can be used as the basis of an appeal with which to obtain funds, is surely tantamount to exploitation,

if not fraud. Needless to say, we kicked up a row and the practice stopped.

To keep myself in touch with modern conditions, I decided to visit some of the charities and get first-hand information about them. I started by going to one of the night shelters. The night I went it was cold, and the wind was blowing hard off the Thames. The shelter was an old warehouse on the south side of the river. I found the gate and rang the bell. A man opened the gate and asked if I had a ticket or a letter. I had neither, so I was shown to the waiting shed. This was a broken-down wooden shack, with holes and gaps in the wood which allowed a steady draught of cold, sharp wind to blow in upon us. Inside was a long form ; about twenty men were waiting their turn to go to the office. Slowly, one at a time, the men were called out. When I was called, I was shown to a desk at which a man was sitting. I sat down, and he went through a long list of inquisitional questions. When I had answered them all he gave me a ticket for one night, and told me to come to the office in the morning at eleven o'clock. I was taken along the yard to another shed, where there were some tables and chairs and even a piano. The men in here seemed to be at their wits' end to know what to do with themselves. Some were walking aimlessly about, others were sitting down talking, and a few were reading. A young lad was punishing the piano with great energy. I asked one man what was likely to happen next, and he told me that supper would be ready at any minute now.

" They are lining up already," he said, " and some

have been lined up this last half-hour. It's the only way if you want a bed out of the wind and cold."

I looked outside, and saw about a hundred men in a long line. They were stamping their feet and blowing their hands in order to keep themselves warm. A door opened and a yell went up : " they're off ! " All the men who were in the room rushed out and joined the rank. Slowly the line moved. It led into another shed, in which were two long trestle tables. When we were all seated, ladies brought round a bowl of soup, a cup of tinned milk, and a piece of bread for each man. During supper an announcement was made that a concert would take place that evening in the room where we had waited. I noticed that most of the others were rushing their supper, and thought at first that the poor devils were so hungry that they had forgotten all table manners. But I saw that as soon as one had finished his soup he got up and left the shed. A man next to me whispered in my ear : " If you're quick you might get a good place. Go up to the loft ; that's the best." And he, too, got up and vanished. I finished my soup and followed him. He went into a shed on the opposite side of the yard and up some steps, with me on his heels. At the top of the steps were several camp beds in rows. Some had coats on them, others had newspapers. I looked for one that appeared to be free. My choice was limited. I could take either one that rocked from side to side or one right on top of the step. I chose the latter, and have regretted it ever since. I sat down for a while and listened to the conversation, to try to find out what would happen next. Some

had not yet decided whether they would attend the concert, others had already started on the evening's exaggerations of the day's events. The scramble for best places had ended. The call soon came for those who were attending the concert to go and take their seats. We went down and joined the mob at the door. The chairs and forms had been set in rows all ready for us. After a time we were let in, and there was the usual scramble for best seats. Then we were asked to keep our seats while young ladies brought round some cigarettes.

The chief weakness of these charity sing-songs is that the type of people who run them are the kind who have lots of good feeling and sympathy but absolutely no organizing ability. Good jokes are often spoilt by bad comedians immediately after a sentimental moral song. One does not expect expert stage management or even great talent from the artists, but those responsible should at least consider their listeners' possible reactions to their efforts.

The behaviour of the men at these concerts is a matter for surprise. While the song is being sung utter boredom is registered upon their faces, but as soon as it is finished they break into great applause. Often it would be difficult to decide whether the clapping was in appreciation of the song or of the fact that it had come to an end. These concerts generally last about two hours, long enough to try the patience of even the most experienced long-sufferer. If the organizers are really interested in what the men think of the various items, I advise them to go up to bed as one of them and listen to

their talk. The night of my visit the criticisms went on until the early hours of the morning. At first there were some intelligent criticisms of the quality of the singing and the nature of the songs. The age-old jokes of the comedians brought out others perhaps not quite so passable, and on and on the talk went until it reached the point at which it can only be described in general terms as disgusting.

The most amazing thing about the type of men who live in these charity shelters is that they can smile at and applaud the actions of the ladies who turn up to help them, and behind their backs can talk of them in the most filthy manner. It is quite common for these men who have lived upon bread and soup for many months, who have not had their clothes off their bodies for weeks and have forgotten what a hot bath is like, to tell one another in detail what they would like to do with the younger ones if they had them alone at night. At night they talk filthily about sex, and boast of the many mean things they have done to curry favour or get a shilling, and during the day they are often found in the churches and outside convents receiving charity as good and well-behaved churchmen in distress.

As the more fortunate went to sleep the talk died down. But I could not. The canvas of the camp bed struck cold to my back, and a draught of cold air from the river was blowing across the room. If I put my jacket over my head my back received the full force of the blast. Some men got up to pace the floor in an endeavour to keep warm, but this only disturbed some of the others who were asleep, and they started shouting at them to lie down. An

argument started, and before long the whole room was in an uproar. This sort of thing continued until daylight, when most of the men went into the yard and walked up and down until breakfast time. It was possible to get a wash, but unless you were among the first you would be unlucky in regard to a towel. At six-thirty we were given a mug of cocoa and some bread and jam. At seven we were told to get out, all except a few who had got helpers' jobs and were staying behind. I had four hours to get through before I was due at the office. I went to the gate, and halted to decide which direction to take. The lad who had slept next to me came out soon after and asked where I was going for my breakfast. "I'm going to the 'Good Companions,'" he said. "Come along and I'll show you the way." I went with him, and he took me to a drill hall at King's Cross. When we arrived about a hundred and fifty men were already there. Some were washing themselves, some shaving, others cleaning their boots. My friend had a ticket, but as I had not I was told I could wash and clean myself, but would get no breakfast until I had been interviewed. There were twenty-five others waiting with me at the office. The main body of men were having breakfast when a lady came to us and asked us to go into the office one at a time. Again the extensive list of questions. I was given a ticket lasting for five days, and told to go and get my meal. I received a bread-and-butter sandwich and a cup of tea. We were allowed to stay in the hall until nine o'clock. My friend told me he was not coming back my way, but was going to a convent at the

back of Selfridges to line up for dinner. " If you have twopence you can get a dinner here at twelve," he said. I made a mental note of the fact, for it would be useful to get so cheap a dinner.

I walked slowly back to the night shelter. When I rang the bell, I was admitted by another doorkeeper. " Are you for an interview ? " he asked me. I said I had been told to call that morning, and gave my name. The man consulted a list. " Yes, you're lucky this morning," he said. " Your bloke has just come and you're first on the list. Sit down there for a bit until you're called." After a few minutes my name was called, and I went into the office. I found that I had been selected as a likely candidate for a hostel, and was given a letter of introduction to the warden.

One of my worst experiences was at a well-known Mission where a man could get free food and shelter. The beds were not too bad, but the food was terrible. Each man got two meals a day: breakfast at 7 a.m., and dinner at 5 p.m. All had to be in by 5 p.m. or forfeit all right to a longer stay. The dinner had a peculiar taint about it, and I could not make out why. Nobody could say I was " finicky " regarding food, but this stuff I could not stomach. I found out the reason next day. At the back of the kitchen was a small larder with a stone slab in it. Each morning two men took a barrow and tins, and collected all the previous day's scraps from various teashops and stores where the staff " live in ", putting the used tea-leaves in a separate tin. When the filth was brought back to the mission it was tipped on to the slab and sorted out. Meat went in

one heap, vegetables went to another. If rice pudding or similar stuff was mixed with the vegetables, it all went to make soup. The menu for dinner was made up according to the result of the sorting. The used tea leaves were " boiled up " and the result served as tea. In order to be privileged to receive a share of this swill, we had to listen every night to the superintendent's version of Christ's Gospels, delivered in a real " hot gospel " manner.

I used to wonder why the police allowed such places to make charitable appeals, but I later found out that there is no direct fraud, because all charity appeals are very carefully worded. When you read : " Help us to help the Homeless and Destitute," you justifiably assume that any money given in response to such an appeal is used to provide food and shelter for the homeless. But that does not necessarily follow. It may be used to provide " spiritual help " instead.

As there are many collectors at work in London, the most successful are those who can put over the best story to the public. Knowing that the public hate the destitute man and think that he ought to be compelled to work for his living, the societies find it of advantage if they can show that all the men they help have to reveal willingness to work by performing a " task ".

There can be no objection to working for what you get if there is some connection between what you do and what you receive. I know that most people will say " It's better than nothing," or, " They ought to be glad there are places like that for men to go to." Be that as it may, the fact remains that a man works

hard all the week, his product is sold, donations towards his keep are collected, and he himself receives far less than does a person doing similar work for a private firm. Some people call it exploitation. I can see no distinction between it and slavery.

I had a turn at one Work Centre, and I worked harder there than on any American lumber job where I received good wages. For eight hours a day I had to lift logs of wood on to the bench of a circular saw. The logs weighed anything from 56 lbs. to 1 cwt., and many had to be handled by two or three men. They were brought in by lorry and dumped in a yard. Besides feeding the saw I had to keep a space clear for the following lorry. Those who were not working in the yard were either chopping or bundling wood. The conditions of work were far superior to those of other similar places, but the foreman kept everyone going at top speed all day.

Such places as these are used by men who are waiting for, or even drawing, unemployment pay, or those who have practically given up hope of ever doing anything for themselves. These men are easy prey to anyone who wishes to exploit them.

As a contrast to these "Work Centres" there is the "hostel" method of treatment. The idea of these places is to rescue destitute men and boys from the "road" and put them in decent surroundings until they find a job. The idea is splendid, but it does not take into account the existence of London's "Gentlemen Tramps".

A "Gentleman Tramp" never leaves town, and never associates with the "destitute mob". According

to their own stories they have held the best of jobs and drawn enormous salaries. Invariably they will tell anyone to whom they condescend to talk that they are only waiting for a job to turn up. Then they will get their car out and all will be well.

I landed in the midst of a gang of these professional beggars when I was given a chance to stay at a hostel. I arrived armed with my letter of introduction to the Warden. I had to wait awhile before I was seen, but then I was shown into the office. The Warden was a very nice chap to talk to, and after an examination into my past history and my future intentions I was handed over to the "secretary".

The secretary was busy at the time, so he told me to sit in a room and he would see me later. I went into what was known as the Library, but which appeared to me to be a "Bridge Club". Several well-dressed and smart-looking men were playing bridge. I sat near a table, hoping to be allowed to pass the time watching the play. Not a word was said to me, and when I tried to break the ice by opening a conversation the one I addressed got up and went out of the room. I could not understand such unsociableness, but decided to await developments. I was called to the office later, and was told the rules of the hostel. I would be expected to do some allotted domestic duty every morning together with everyone else, and after that I would be expected to be out of the hostel in search of work between the hours of 9 a.m. and 5 p.m.

I thought of the bridge players in the room outside, and wondered if they were "seeking work".

After being told the meal- and bed-times I was informed that I should have a bath, and if I wanted any better clothes they would be supplied.

" You can remain to lunch to-day," said the secretary, " and you had better stay in the next room until noon. Don't bother with the crowd you find there, for you'll find them difficult."

The secretary was not wrong. I certainly did find them difficult. I could not get a civil word from any of them all the time I was waiting for lunch.

After lunch I had my bath, and was supplied with a suit and a full rig-out. I felt like a new man. To my astonishment, when I next came near the " Gentleman Tramps " someone condescended to smile at me, and two of them actually spoke. The social boycott was lifted as soon as I had changed my appearance. If they thought that it would have some good effect upon me they were mistaken. Their attitude only convinced me that I was among a crowd of snobs.

Most of the men went out during the afternoon, but a few of the " crack " bridge players carried on with the game.

The secretary came to me and handed me a daily newspaper. I did not realize that he stayed near me to see which page I turned to. Being interested in sport, I turned to the football page. That was my first mistake. He pointed out to me that a man genuinely seeking work would have turned first to the " situations vacant " page. He found the page for me, and told me to pick out any job I would like to apply for. He would give me pen and paper, and post the letter for me when I had written it. While

I was reading through the many advertisements I met the first really sociable chap in the hostel. He looked at me and said :

" Any new ones in there, pal ? "

I did not get the point of his question, so did not answer in words but gave him an interrogative look. He peered over my shoulder at the column.

" Don't see any," he said. Then he told me who the various advertisers were and what they wanted done.

This man had made a practice of answering all the advertisements in the paper, and he had collected an interesting file of replies. His file clearly showed that over 50 per cent. of the " situations vacant " advertisements were either frauds or of such a character that the average man would not touch them. Although most of the advertisements gave box numbers for replies he could give the names and addresses of the advertisers, and could tell what sort of job would be offered. I tested his knowledge that afternoon. I answered three advertisements, and he told me what replies I would get. He was right in each case.

I told the secretary of this, but he merely shrugged his shoulders and said :

" Why worry ? It costs you nothing, does it ? "

I soon learned that very few " hostellers " were interested in finding work, and as there was no danger of their going hungry there was no urgent need for them to seek it.

Men in these hostels develop much the same habits as the scrounger who visits convents and missions. As every day is a day of idleness it is necessary to do

something to pass away the time. The public libraries are handy, but even newspapers and magazines do not take a whole day to read, so he has to go elsewhere.

Of all the places of interest which are open free to the public, the ones which appeal most to the hosteller are the Old Bailey and the Law Courts. One day, after I had been at the hostel a couple of weeks, I was invited to go to the Law Courts to hear the final speeches in a divorce case. I thought that I would have to keep it a secret from the others, so said nothing about it. To my surprise, when I arrived with my guide at the Law Courts over half of the waiting queue were " hostellers ", and from the conversation I found that two other hostels were well represented. The climax came when the secretary strolled in to hear the case, and found he could not get into the public gallery because it was filled with " hostellers " who were " diligently seeking work ".

After my stay at that hostel I realized that the " Work Aid Homes " and such places are filled mainly with scroungers and men living by their wits, while the genuine man who is seeking work does not receive any help.

Some of the hostellers did seek work, and a few even did some. In London are several agencies where a man can get work addressing envelopes and enclosing bills in envelopes, or distributing bills from door to door. Because of the many applicants for these jobs the pay is small, but as a " hosteller " has room and board free he can afford to undercut even the lowest paid worker. By earning three or four

shillings a day at this work a " hosteller " is often much better off than those good-hearted young men and women who subscribe weekly to the upkeep of a hostel.

When I left the hostel I intended to clear out of London for good, but that was not to be. I eventually found myself in a Public Institution. An Institution or Workhouse is often used by a tramp as a resting-place when he is getting footsore and weary. They vary greatly in regard both to food and bedding, and to the methods of applying the " Poor Law Regulations ". It would be hard to say which is the best workhouse in London, for a " good workhouse " is an unknown quantity there. But it is easy to name the worst.

The one I stayed at has undoubtedly the most abominable record of any in London. At one time the place resembled a " Monte Carlo ". Drinking, gambling, and immorality at its worst were all going on. Together with this, overcrowding and foul sanitary arrangements created a state of affairs which can best be described as " Hell ". The " rough-necks " and " tough guys " of that part of London used the place as a rest camp. Many of them were drawing pensions from the Government, so there was plenty of cash available. Crown and Anchor boards were to be seen in the day rooms. Card " schools " were dotted here and there, and the " bar " was operated from the basement. For a few coppers you could buy anything from a modest cup of tea to a brew of the most vile " wine ".

The " gangsters " held full sway. The officials would not subject these " thugs " to the rigid search

which the regulations enjoin, but any unfortunate tramp who was seeking a rest from the road for a week or two would suffer by having even the tobacco dust shaken from the linings of his pockets. The food was filthy and undercooked. The best of it was stolen from the kitchen and sold to the "gangsters" who were able to pay. There were two distinct sections of inmates: those who were using the institution for the legitimate purpose of taking shelter while destitute, and the others who, having an income, preferred to sleep and eat in this place so that they could gamble and drink without the fear of police raids.

Such were the conditions I found in this institution. Although on admittance I had been thoroughly searched, and was informed that "everybody went through it", I saw bottles of methylated spirits and even rum, in the reception ward. A man who came in with me had a cigarette-end taken from him; but when he went into the reception ward another inmate offered to sell him some "hard up", or tobacco which has been gleaned from the pickings of the street. The seller kept his tobacco in a pillow slip, and it was packed twelve inches deep. He charged one penny for a handful or for ten rolled cigarettes. Imagine the feelings of a tramp who has just been deprived of his last smoke on realizing that others can pass the search with such vast quantities of tobacco. But you are not expected to have "feelings" in a workhouse. On entry your private clothes are taken away and replaced with a suit of "cords". I have never seen anyone in "cords" which fit. To make you more uncomfortable by

giving ill-fitting and ugly clothes is a policy which has been carried out in London institutions for many years. It is enough to break the heart of any man who has some pride in his personal appearance.

The "medical examination" was a farce. All those who have entered overnight are lined up for the doctor the next morning. If the doctor comes the men file past him, and if no complaint is made they are passed as "able-bodied". If the doctor does not turn up the attendant calls out for anyone sick to step forward. All the others are marked A.B. and dismissed. Owing to this negligence many ugly situations arise. Men with ailments they are trying to conceal pass through undetected, and so endanger the health of other inmates. In one outstanding instance an inmate whose duty it was to handle the margarine before it went on to the tables was suffering from a chronic complaint, the symptoms of which were running sores on his hands and arms.

Because of the overcrowding many of us were put into a dormitory. It was in the basement of the building, far below the ground level. All the windows were nailed up and, although there were lavatories a few yards away, the door was locked at night and pails were provided for sanitary purposes. The blankets and mattresses were so close together that they touched. After an hour or two the air became stifling. No towels were provided in the morning, and those who did wash had to use a bed sheet. The water closets were so badly out of order that water to a depth of six inches lay on the floor at all times.

The meals were short-weight and badly cooked.

I and others were compelled to walk about hungry, while the "gangsters" fed well because they could buy food from the kitchen staff. Such conditions are bad enough to cause a "riot" among the inmates.

Yet, through all the tragedy and humour of the destitute's life one fact clearly emerges. It is that, bad as are the workhouses and casual wards, his greatest enemies are the charity shark and the alms-giver. I do not know of a single charity dealing with the homeless that does not grind them lower down the social scale. That result may not be intentional, but the fact remains that I do not know one place where a man can go and receive real benefit.

The night coffee stall is generally regarded as a blessing to men and women who have to spend the night out in the street. Yet I know of three girls who are now earning their living as prostitutes, who would either be at home with their people or in some useful occupation if they had not hung around the coffee stall. In London, as in all large cities, there is a type of man and woman always on the look-out for young girls in distress. They fall into conversation with the youngsters standing around the stall, adopt a sympathetic pose, and gain their confidence. An invitation to a cup of coffee or some supper is readily accepted by the hungry girls, and from that time they see no more of the coffee stall. They are not all London-born ; many of them come from the provinces, and especially the distressed areas, brought to London by promises of work. Many never even get a job offered to them, while others go to places where for a very low pay they are

expected to do the work of two. Nearly every girl to be met in the Mall or on the Embankment will tell you that. If they ever had any job at all, it was as a domestic at about eight shillings a week.

These girls are also a danger to the men who are destitute. It is no use expecting a man to be more moral when he is down and out than when he is in a good job with good pay. I have often seen a bench packed with four or five men, with one of these girls in the midst of them. Of course, if the police saw it they might stop the business, but those who are enjoying her company take care to arrange an overcoat or some other covering in such a manner that it is impossible to tell her sex.

Fights often occur among the destitute because one of them has seduced one of these poor wretches. The police will do nothing, beyond clearing every one out of the area. Some of the girls get so demoralized and dazed through this continual seduction that they have no powers of resistance left. A girl in this condition was taken into a shelter one night. The place was an old church hall which is open every night. Tea and bread and dripping are given away, and the men are allowed to sleep on the floor if they wish to stop. At two o'clock the lights are turned low. When I went I arrived about midnight, and the hall was so full that the men standing around could hardly bend their arms in order to drink or eat. I wondered how we could lie on the floor in such circumstances, but a man next to me told me that the hall would soon be a little emptier.

"When the 'pansies' have selected their husbands you'll get a chance to sit down," he said.

I thought I had caught the girlish voices of homosexuals, and sure enough there were about a dozen of them among the crowd by the door. The noise was terrible, everybody seemed to be talking at once. Some were trying to attract the attention of the "homos", while others were pulling their legs, throwing them kisses and calling them girls' names. Every now and then one of the "pansies" would leave the hall, accompanied by a man. I was thinking of clearing out when I heard a clap of thunder, and down came the rain. Bad as the hall was, it was better to stay and keep dry than take a chance of finding shelter elsewhere. Yet in spite of the steady rain the crowd dwindled until it was possible for me to sit down, although still not everybody could stretch their legs.

I gathered that many of the men who had gone out had homes or beds to go to, and only used the place for a gamble. I was told that if we waited patiently by the door, some of those around would sooner or later get on to the table and play cards. Then if we were quick we could stretch our legs and possibly get some sleep. A lady's voice called from the door: "No talking, please," and the hall quietened down. The lights were turned low, and by the door it was quite dark. The sound of snoring arose, and a very fuggy atmosphere developed, owing to the smell of bad breath and of men who had not had a bath for weeks. I began to feel sick, and probably would have been if there had not been a sudden gush of fresh air. "Close that door!" someone growled. "Hold your bloody noise," someone else replied. The door closed. There was

a movement in the darkness, as though two or three of the men were trying to get across the bodies of those asleep. I felt some movement by my feet, so I drew them up to let the men pass. But they stayed where they were, and immediately took advantage of the space I had made.

For a while all was quiet. But suddenly there was a commotion. A girl's voice screamed out. Someone called for lights, and when they were put on I saw one of the most terrible sights I have known. On the floor lay a young girl, her clothing all disordered. She lay apparently paralysed with terror or exhaustion. Three young lads ran out of the hall, and when the official in charge came on the scene all he did was to turn the poor girl out into the night.

Some of the men started accusing one another, and soon a free fight was in progress. I got out of it as quickly as I could, and others followed me. About a hundred yards away from the hall I saw the girl leaning against a wall, and crying bitterly. We could get no sense out of her at all. She would not talk, but kept looking up and down the street. We did all we could to comfort her, and at last got her to agree to come farther away from the hall in case the police were called to quell the disturbance, which had now spread out of the hall into the main road. I and two other men walked with her to Birdcage Walk. On the way she composed herself a little and began to talk. We all sat down on a bench, and the story she told would have shocked the most callous.

She had lived the Embankment life for three weeks.

Every night she had yielded herself to some man for the price of a tea and bun. She had come from Durham a month previously to work as a domestic, and was engaged through an agency to work for a man who was separated from his wife. Her duties were to look after three children, cook all meals, clean the house and do the shopping, and all for eight and sixpence a week and board. She stayed there only a week, and did not receive even her week's pay because she was not prepared to let the man have relations with her. She ran away. Each night she decided to start walking home in the morning, but as each dawn broke she found herself in such a state that she could not face such a long trek.

We talked it over together, and at last came to the conclusion that the best thing was to get her to make an application for admission to the workhouse in the morning, and let the rates provide her fare home. We stayed with her until nine o'clock, when the Relieving Officer came on duty, and waited outside the office to be at hand if he became cantankerous and tried to avoid issuing an order to her. After about half an hour she came out with an order for admission to an L.C.C. Institution.

At first we had thought of trying to get her into a Home. But if she had she would have had to work for nothing, and could never have saved enough to pay for her fare back to her parents. By going to the workhouse she would be fed and clothed, be seen by the doctor, and three weeks later would be sent by train to her home. I know that many people regard charity as better than the Poor Law, but

while I think both are bad I am satisfied that the Poor Law system is better than almsgiving. One point that always appeals to me is that if you accept charity you have to take what is offered without demur. But in a Poor Law Institution you know what you are entitled to, and can even invoke the law to establish your rights.

As a rule, whether you receive charity or not depends upon what impression you make upon the donors or their representatives. But under the Poor Law all who apply must receive the prescribed relief.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

It is now 1936, over twenty-two years since the day when as a boy I took my first step towards a tramp's life. To record all the experiences of that long period would take a dozen books, but I hope I have brought out the points which show the easy and the hard spots in " Life on the Road ".

Twenty-two years " On the Road " should be enough to teach anyone a lesson, and I feel now that the experience was worth it, because I have an understanding of human nature which I could hardly have obtained had I lived an " orthodox life ", with all its hypocrisies and make-believes, petty snobbery and arrogant conceit. Walking along the road I have received friendship from the few and contempt and abuse from the many. The abuse of ignorant people has given me an insight into the beastly nature of human society as it is at present constituted.

For instance, most motorists take great delight in accelerating the engines of their cars when passing a tramp. Many even drive so close to him that the force of the wind blows him into the bank or the ditch. In Christian England this is considered to be great fun, and many are surprised and disgusted when a tramp retaliates by throwing a stone or stick through the window of the car. I remember an incident when a motoring party were so thick-skinned as to seek help from two of us after they had played

one of the most dirty tricks one could play on a tramp. There were four of them in a large touring car. As they passed me and a friend the car drew up, and one of the ladies waved us on and shouted that if we would like a lift they would give us one. We were fairly tired at the time, so both of us were glad of the chance of getting over the next few miles more comfortably. When we got within a yard of the car the driver opened out and the car sped away at a great speed. Above the roar of the engine we could hear the women's shrieks of laughter. But this time they laughed too soon. About two miles farther along the road we found they had had a skid and had landed in a ditch. In the struggle to get the car out of the ditch the driver had used up all his petrol, and was faced with a long walk for more. They were ignorant enough to think they could get us to go for some petrol, and also help take off the heavy luggage which was on the back end of the car.

They were unlucky, and we had the pleasure of sitting down a little way off and watching them in their predicament. A road patrol came along, and we had further pleasure in giving information which would make the drawing of insurance very difficult.

It is not only the better-off class of people who throw insults at the tramps. Gangs of hooligans going to football matches, etc., take great delight in shouting after a tramp, or even throwing orange peel or bottles at him. His plight often gives Sunday School children an opportunity to show how well they have been brought up. Shouts and cat-calls are considered great fun, and no doubt when these youngsters turn up at Sunday School the following

Sunday the little hypocrites sing the hymn : " Do no sinful action, speak no angry word," as if it were impossible for them to do anything of which they might be ashamed.

On the other hand there are a few drivers on the road who recognize that a tramp is a human being. Some lorry drivers, for instance, take a chance of losing jobs in order to give one a lift, and I have had some long lifts from commercial travellers. The most amazing thing about the general public is that while all strive to keep poverty away from their doors because they fear the consequent hardships, so long as they are fairly comfortable they care little or nothing for the plight of those who are suffering the worst of poverty. In their own little self-centred lives they do not realize the tragedy of destitution until they themselves are destitute.

I have been struck, too, by the amazing airs some people put on after giving a penny to a charity. They seem to think they have fulfilled their obligation to society when they have helped to give a destitute a slice of bread and margarine, although they themselves would not be content with less than a substantial meal. If it is a sound argument that society is responsible for the relief of the destitute, surely the standard of relief should be high enough to keep men fit, and not force them to walk the roads.

I am fully satisfied that so long as the relief of destitution is carried on mainly by charity organizations, so long will we have the tragic sights which are to be seen in any part of the country to-day. The reason is obvious. Just as a rat-catcher does

not kill all the rats he finds, because he knows that if he did his livelihood would be gone, so most charity committees and organizations do nothing which would eventually do away entirely with the condition of destitution, because if they did the basis upon which they appeal for funds would be gone.

Charity frauds and maladministration of public funds can only continue so long as the general public remains ignorant of its social obligation to all men.

So long as the people of Britain feel that the half-million vagrants like the " life on the road ", and that they in fact choose such a life rather than seek work, so long will conditions remain as they are. But if any feel that such conditions should not exist, and are prepared to do something about changing them, then my last few words may indicate a channel of inquiry by which they may gain the knowledge necessary to such a social change.

To-day a tramp is one of the " industrial derelicts " due to the increasing number of unemployed workers. He is forced to a " life on the road " because he has no settled home, and so does not qualify for any State relief. There is no difference at all between the unemployed man living at home and the homeless unemployed man, yet, when the question of relief is raised, the one living at home is given " out-door " relief, while the other is driven either into the ranks of the beggars and scroungers of the mission halls or forced to " take the road ".

Until the question of discrimination between " settled " and " homeless " is fairly dealt with we shall have an army of tramps on the roads of Britain.

The injustice of the discrimination can be seen when it is realized that both the "settled" and the "homeless" pay rates and taxes, unemployment insurance, etc., when at work, but when, owing to unemployment, they have to draw from the funds, the "settled" man goes on drawing long after his twenty-six weeks' statutory pay has been exhausted, while the homeless man finds all channels of relief closed to him except the casual ward or workhouse.

The preachers and politicians have failed to get a grip of the situation, and the only hope of getting the tramps off the road is by arousing the public conscience to the necessity for a great ideal. I cannot see anything being done to rid the country of abject poverty until the ideal of the Brotherhood of Man is striven for.

Until we recognize it to be our duty to obey the moral law, "Love ye one another," we shall continue to have with us the vile results of evil living.

As a start in the right direction I suggest that we work towards the goal of putting all destitute persons on a standard of living comparable with what satisfies the average man. You may shudder at the thought of the cost, but what does that matter? If these men are your brothers, then they are entitled to brotherly treatment.

Even if they find it difficult to fit in again with the customs of society, and so do not pull as much weight as you in the productive field, do not put the entire blame upon them, for their condition arises from a life which was forced upon them because society did not do its duty in the first place.